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THE EVIDENCES
OF THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS.

THE
EVIDENCES
OF THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS.

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P R E F A C E.

CONCERNING the heretical Jewish Christians, the Ebionites, and their use of the Gospel of St. Matthew, little remains to be added to what has been said in the first volume. Among the Gentile Christians, there was, I believe, no other body of men beside the Gnostics, who were generally regarded as heretics before the close of the second century. It may, perhaps, be doubted, whether the Montanists should not be considered as forming an exception to this remark; but, whether they were or were not generally regarded as heretics before the period mentioned, is unimportant to our present argument, since there is no doubt that, in common with the catholic Christians, they received the four Gospels as genuine; and their doctrines were so coincident with those of the catholic Christians, that no separate value attaches to their testimony. The evidence afforded by the Gnostics, therefore, is the main topic of inquiry in the present volume.

In order to understand the nature and value of this evidence, it is necessary to be acquainted with the history and doctrines of the Gnostics, and the relation in which they stood to the catholic Christians. But this subject is one of very considerable difficulty. The Gnostics have hung like a dark cloud round the early history of Christianity. Such accounts have been given of them as to make their existence appear something strange and inexplicable. The obscurity thus spread over the early history of our religion has afforded opportunity for surmises and objections unfavorable to its truth. Whatever may tend to dispel it, and to let in a clearer light on the circumstances accompanying the reception of Christianity in the Gentile world, may tend equally to strengthen our assurance of the reality of what is recorded in the Gospels.

It may be added, that the doctrines of the Gnostics are connected with some of the most important facts in the history of opinions, and some of the most remarkable phenomena in the operations of the human mind. In order to be understood, they must be viewed in their relation to the circumstances in which they had their origin. We are thus led to enter on a wide inquiry concerning these circumstances, whence our immediate subject receives illustration, and to which also it affords illustration in return. While studying in a proper manner the doctrines of

the Gnostics, we are at the same time studying the character of ancient philosophy, and the tendencies of thought on the higher subjects of speculation.

The two volumes now published contain such a view, as it has been in my power to give, of the historical evidence, both direct and subsidiary, of the genuineness of the Gospels. Should my life and health be continued, it is my purpose to add another volume concerning the internal evidences of their genuineness. But I wish this to appear simultaneously with a new translation of the Gospels, accompanied by explanatory notes, on which I have been long engaged. Such a translation seems to me a necessary basis for the volume proposed, while the volume may serve as an introduction to the translation.

Cambridge, 5 December, 1843.

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PART III.

**ON THE EVIDENCE FOR THE GENUINENESS OF THE
GOSPELS AFFORDED BY THE EARLY HERETICS.**

THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.—GENERAL ACCOUNT OF THE
GNOSTICS.—STATE OF OPINION AMONG THE GREAT
BODY OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE SECOND CENTURY.

WE now come to a subject, concerning which important errors have been committed, and which requires a more thorough examination than it has hitherto received. It is the manner in which the Gospels were regarded by the heretics of the first two centuries, particularly by the Gnostics.

Beside the great body of Christians, the *Catholic* Christians, as they may be denominated, conformably to the ancient use of the term, who were united, notwithstanding many diversities of opinion, in the general reception of a common system of faith, there were, at an early period, various sects called *Heresies*. The generality of the Heretics of the first two centuries may be divided into two principal classes, the Ebionites and the Gnostics; and these two classes alone are of importance as furnishing evidence in regard to the genuineness of the Gospels.

Of the EBIONITES, the heretical Jewish Christians, I have formerly given some account,* in which I have anticipated nearly all that may be said concerning them in relation to the present subject. They were a sect that attracted but little notice from the earlier fathers; whose accounts of them, however, are explicit and consistent. The discussions concerning them, in modern times, have been founded principally on the confused, contradictory, and obviously very inaccurate statements of Epiphanius, in the latter part of the fourth century. But all the ancient accounts of them agree, as we have formerly seen, in affirming that they used the Gospel of Matthew in its original language, with a text more or less pure. As has been remarked, this would not have been said of them, had they not said it of themselves. They comprehended, probably, the generality of Jewish Christians, and appear to have been the successors of the first converts in Judea, with little intermixture of those Jews, the Hellenists, to whom, as living in foreign countries, the Greek language was often more familiar than that of their own nation. Thus, using the Gospel of Matthew, which was written in their native language, and, as there seems no doubt, with particular reference to Jewish Christians, they neglected the other Gospels. Their testimony in receiving the Gospel of Matthew as his work is blended with that of the common mass of Christians. Nor is it important to urge it any further; but it may be worth while, here as elsewhere, to keep in mind those considerations, formerly presented,† which show, that the direct proof of the genuineness of any one of the Gospels is an indirect proof of the genuineness of all.

We here take leave of the Ebionites, and enter on a much more extensive and difficult subject. Our attention will now be confined to the GNOSTICS.

The Greek word rendered *Gnostic* denoted, in its primary

* Vol. i. pp. 196-204.

† Vol. i. pp. 116-120.

meaning, an enlightened man ; and is commonly used by Clement of Alexandria to signify an enlightened Christian, a Christian philosopher.* In this sense, it was assumed as a designation by those heretics to whom the name is now restricted. The heretical Gnostics were divided into many particular sects ; but there were striking characteristics common to them all, by which they were distinguished from the great body of Christians. Their religion was eclectic. While some of their contemporaries among the Heathens, of a similar cast of mind to their own, the later Platonists, were forming systems in opposition to, and in rivalry of, Christianity, they, on the contrary, incorporated into their theology the historical facts, and some of the essential doctrines, of our faith. In the systems thus composed by the Gnostics, foreign as they were from pure Christianity, the ministry of Christ held a very important place. It was the key-stone of their hypotheses.

Some of the leaders of the Gnostic sects appear to have been generally regarded in their day as men of more than common learning and ability ; and their systems were so accordant with conceptions and habits of thinking which then prevailed, as to obtain a considerable degree of reputation and credence. Of the doctrines maintained by them, it is necessary to our purpose to give some general account, which, in order that it may be at all satisfactory, or afford ground for a correct estimate of the character of those doctrines, will lead us to look beyond the Gnostics considered in themselves, and to view them in their relations to the state of things in which they existed.

By the generality of Christians, they were regarded as adversaries, not as fellow disciples ; and they, in return, looked upon the many, as unenlightened followers of Christ, who did

* This meaning survived the application of the word to the Gnostic heretics. In the Lexicon ascribed to Zonaras, who lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, *Γνωστικός* (a "Gnostic") is defined to be "one perfectly conformed to the truth," *ὁ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ποιῶν τὴν τελείωσιν*.

not comprehend the essential character of his mission, were ignorant of the true God, whom he came to reveal, and mistook for that God, who had been before unknown, the inferior being who was the God of the Jews. With the exception of the Marcionites, they appear generally to have considered themselves as distinguished from all others, in their original conformation, by the peculiar possession of a spiritual principle, implanted in their nature, which was a constant source of divine illumination. Thus, in examining into the genuineness of the Gospels, the early Gnostics present themselves as an independent set of witnesses, widely separated, in their opinions and feelings, from the catholic Christians. Their doctrines were, at the same time, of such a character, as to seem, at first view, to admit of no reconciliation with the contents of the Gospels. "It was impossible," says Gibbon, "that the Gnostics could receive our present Gospels, many parts of which (particularly in the resurrection of Christ) are directly, and, as it might seem, designedly, pointed against their favorite tenets."* If, notwithstanding this supposed impossibility, we should find that the Gnostics actually bear testimony to the genuineness of the Gospels, their evidence must clearly have a distinct and peculiar value.

It is true, that other sects, whose doctrines may appear to an intelligent Christian as irreconcilable with the contents of the Gospels, as those of the Gnostics, have been zealous in asserting the claim of those books to the highest deference. But this has been done under very different circumstances. The systems of those sects have been slowly formed during ages of ignorance and false reasoning; the true sense of the language of the Gospels has been gradually obliterated, and false meanings, derived from a barbarous theology, have been substituted in its place; the considerations necessary to be attended to, in order to understand the words of Jesus, have been disregarded, and thus, the key to their true explanation

* Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Ch. xv., note 35. Vol. ii. p. 286. 8vo. London. 1820.

being lost or thrown away, modes of interpretation have been introduced, at once so irrational and so unsettled, that, by their application, the Scriptures may be made to speak any doctrine. Those systems, having no aid from reason, but, being assailed by it on every side, have been obliged to rely, for their sole support, on the supposititious meanings assigned to the Scriptures ; and thus, in the very act of falsifying the testimony of the books appealed to, it has become essential to maintain their credit. At the same time, the prevailing belief in the genuineness of the Gospels, not being the result of any investigation of the subject, had assumed the character of an inveterate and unassailable prejudice. But the case of the Gnostics was widely different. Their systems were in harmony with many of the philosophical speculations of their age, and relied for support upon doctrines already received, rather than upon the misinterpretation of the Scriptures. If they admitted the Gospels as genuine, they did not feel obliged, in consequence, to admit their authority as final ; they appealed to other sources of religious knowledge, to their own reasonings, to oral tradition,—by which they pretended, that the higher and esoteric doctrines of Jesus had been transmitted to them,—and to the divine light within, the privilege of their spiritual nature. But it is particularly to be observed, that the earlier Gnostics lived at a time, when, if the Gospels be not genuine, the question respecting their credit and value must have been entirely open and unsettled ; that, upon the supposition of their not being genuine, they were works of the contemporaries of those Gnostics, or of individuals of the age immediately preceding ; and that their late origin, therefore, must have been so notorious, that no process of reasoning could have been required to make it evident, that they were not genuine. But, in rejecting their authority on such indisputable ground, the Gnostics, instead of carrying on a doubtful and disadvantageous contest, would have gained a decisive triumph over their opponents by simply pointing out the fact, that the catholic system of faith, so far

as it contradicted their own, was founded on writings pretending to an authority which they did not possess.

It follows, from what has been said, that the nature and value of the evidence, which the Gnostics afford for the genuineness of the Gospels, cannot be understood and correctly estimated without some acquaintance with their history and doctrines. The subject is worthy of investigation, and I enter the more readily upon the explanation of it,—such explanation as it may be in my power to give,—because it is not only necessary to my present purpose, but will also lead us to various points of view important as illustrating the history of opinions, and the early history and evidences of our religion. It may be well, before proceeding further, to advert to some of these aspects of the inquiry.

The study of the history and doctrines of the Gnostics, connected as those doctrines were with the morals and philosophy of the age, and giving birth to controversies in which much of the character of the age is exhibited, may enlarge our views of the condition of the world, when Christianity was revealed; and every accession to our knowledge concerning the intellectual and moral state of men in those times is adapted to strengthen our conviction of the divine origin of our religion. In order to have a full conception of the evidences and value of Christianity, we must be informed of the state of the human character, that existed at the time of its introduction, and with which it had to struggle. As our prospect widens and becomes more distinct, we may be reminded of the ancient doctrine of the East, that this world is the battle-field of the good and evil spirits who divide the universe. The power of our religion will be perceived in the strength of the obstacles over which it triumphed. Its great truths, in their own nature intelligible as they are sublime, were then “dark with excessive bright.” Men’s minds were overwhelmed by their grandeur and novelty, and could not

open to their full comprehension. In their colossal simplicity, they stood opposed to the baseless and visionary speculations which then passed for philosophy. The very plainness of their evidence, appealing only to the authority of God, as made evident by miraculous displays of his power, was in striking contrast with the reasoning of the age, resting on dreams, dealing with slippery words, and full of shallow subtleties. The morality of the Gospel, having for its object to free the individual from whatever may injure himself or others, and to teach him that his highest good consists in acting for the common good of all, presented itself in strange contrast with the unabashed selfishness, the gross and loathsome sensuality, the rapacity, violence, and cruelty, which overspread society. This morality was, at the same time, very different from that magnificent but impracticable scheme, which, though fully developed only by the Stoics, was presented in its chief lineaments by all the higher philosophy of the age; the professed purpose of which was to aggrandize, and, as it were, deify its disciple, by raising him above all passion and suffering, to teach him, as the sum of duty, to bear and to forbear, and to place him in a state of stern, insulated quiet, unmoved by all around him. The first word which our religion addressed to men, was "Reform." It came to re-create their characters, to change them in their own view from earthly to immortal beings, to call forth new affections, to supply new principles and aims, and to teach "the new doctrine of piety,"* making men feel what they had not before conceived of, their relations to God. By revealing Him, it came to annihilate the superstitions of the Heathen world, blended, as they were, with all its history, philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, forming an essential part of the machinery of government, entering into the daily habits of common life, and the source of those frequent festivals, games, and shows, which, barbarous and licentious as they often were, afforded to the many their most exciting pleasures. A prin-

* Τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

ciple was at work, which could not have been of human origin ; for it had to contend with all that existed on earth, except what might remain uncorrupted in the moral nature of man.

The strength of the errors that were to be overcome may be partially estimated by their continued operation to the present day, appearing in false doctrines, which were gradually introduced, and are now incorporated with the professed faith of most Christians ; in modern systems of what is called philosophy, allied in thought and language to the mysticism of the later Platonists, and the pantheism of other ancient theologians ; and in the influences of Pagan history and literature upon our taste and morals, in changing and debasing that standard of human excellence, which Christianity would lead us to form.

Such being the state of the ancient world, the conceptions of our religion entertained by its early converts were not only imperfect, but were modified and discolored by the universal prevalence of error. These converts might change their hearts and lives, but they could not renovate their minds. They could not divest themselves of the whole character of their age, so as fully to comprehend the great truths they had been taught, in their proper bearing upon the conceptions and doctrines prevailing around them. They could not break up all their previous associations of thought and feeling, originate new and rational systems of the highest philosophy, and pursue only those correct modes of reasoning, which, even at the present day, are but partially understood, and imperfectly applied to all subjects connected with our moral and intellectual nature. They could not at once do for themselves what many centuries have been slowly effecting for the wisest of modern times.

The causes which operated in common upon the Christian converts, to alloy the doctrines of our faith with the errors of the age, produced their most remarkable effects among the Gnostics. More visionary and more self-confident than the catholic Christians, they relied more on their philosophy, and

less on the written records of our religion. Many of them, also, were among the mystics of those times, and trusted for guidance to their divine inward light. Hence, the Gnostics proceeded to extravagances, from which the catholic Christians kept aloof. But, in comparing together the opinions of the two parties, we shall find that their conceptions often approximated each other, and that, with essential differences of doctrine, there were, also, remarkable analogies and coincidences.

Thus, though the Gnostic doctrines were in stronger contrast with the truths of Christianity, than the errors and misconceptions of the catholic Christians, yet, as they had ultimately the same origin or occasion, as they are to be traced alike to the false notions which had prevailed in the world, either among Heathens or Jews, their history may serve to bring out to view more distinctly the direct and indirect operation of some of those causes of error, that enthralled the minds of the early catholic Christians; to make us apprehend more clearly, that there might be, and were, many conceptions of the wisest among them, which are not to be confounded with the doctrines of Christ; and to enable us to discern the real derivation of opinions, that we might otherwise ascribe, as they have been ascribed, to traditionary explanations, or to mere misconceptions of our faith. It is in a great measure by such investigations, that Christianity may be relieved from that apparent responsibility for what, in fact, are but the errors of its disciples, which, at the present day, is a principal obstacle to its reception.

It is true, that in the fundamental opinions of the early catholic Christians, as they appear in the writings of the most eminent of their number during the first three centuries, there was nothing that essentially changed the character of our religion, or was adapted greatly to pervert its moral influence. But, when we compare their writings with the New Testament, and remark the operation of the world around them on their sentiments and belief, we are, if I mistake not,

irresistibly led to the conclusion, that the religion of Christ, the religion taught in the Gospels, did not come into being at any period subsequent to his time. Those who became its disciples after his death did not originate what they but imperfectly and erroneously apprehended. They were not the authors of doctrines or of books, of which they were, in many respects, but poor expositors.

Nor, it may be added, did Christianity have its origin in any wisdom of a preceding age. Distinguishable, as it is, from the opinions of its earlier converts respecting it, it stands far more widely separated from all that preceded it, either in the Jewish or Gentile world. There is nothing human, to which its origin can be traced. When we understand the Gospels, and enter into their spirit;—when we consider their teachings respecting God, his inseparable relations to all his creatures, and his universal providence and love; their disclosures concerning man's immortality and the purposes of life, our duties and our prospects; their narrative as consistent as it is wonderful, and their unparalleled portraiture of moral greatness in the character of Jesus; and when we observe, that these histories are inartificial and imperfect, written in a rude style, clearly that of uneducated persons, so that their intrinsic character, even in this respect alone, precludes, as an incredible anomaly, the idea, that they were the result of literary skill, the study of philosophy, or any art of man,—it becomes evident, that their existence cannot be explained by any thing known or felt on earth before the events which they record. It is a phenomenon, marked by its dissimilitude from all around it, the unlikeness between the things of time and eternity, and, if I may so speak, between man and God.

As has been said, the religion of Christ is one thing, and the religion of the early Christians was another. But this renders it the more necessary, in order to estimate correctly the character of the early fathers, the early writers of eminence among the catholic Christians, that we should not

forget the strong disturbing forces which acted upon their minds, to draw them from the sphere of Christian truth. They labored under great disadvantages from the universal ignorance of the Gentile world respecting many of the new subjects presented to their inquiry. On the one hand, they were biased by the inveterate errors of their age; and, on the other, so far as those errors were connected with licentiousness of life, they were repelled by them to the opposite extreme of asceticism in speculation and practice,—an extreme to which, also, they were led by their hard circumstances, as members of a suffering and persecuted sect. To judge them fairly, we must be acquainted with the principles, conceptions, and modes of reasoning, which characterized the philosophy of their times, and had modified all existing forms of thought, having been transmitted from the ancient philosophers, particularly Plato, with the whole weight of their authority. We must know what advances the human intellect had made, comprehend the influences under which their minds had been formed, and compare them, not with the most enlightened men of modern times, who have enjoyed advantages for the culture of the understanding, which they never dreamed of, but with their predecessors and contemporaries. We must view them, like all other eminent men of ancient days, as figures in the age to which they belong, and not bring them prominently forward, surrounded only by modern associations. If ignorant of the philosophy of their age, we have no standard by which to judge of their intellectual powers. Nay, we shall often misunderstand their meaning, and may direct our contempt or ridicule, not against what they have said, but against our own misconception of what they have said. Now, the doctrines of the Gnostics will show us what extravagances might be advanced by those who were reputed able and learned men in the times of which we speak; and such is the connection or identity of many opinions of the Gnostics with opinions that had before been held, or were appearing simultaneously in the writings of

their contemporaries, that we cannot study their systems without being led to look beyond them to the philosophy of the age ; and, in doing so, we shall find that the Christian fathers suffer as little by a comparison with the Heathen philosophers, as with the Gnostic heretics. Such are some of the considerations incidentally presented to us in the inquiry on which we are now about to enter.

The Gnostics may be separated into two great divisions ; the MARCIONITES, on the one hand, and the *THEOSOPHIC* GNOSTICS, as they may be called, on the other ; this epithet being understood as referring to the imaginations of the latter respecting the Supreme God, and the spiritual world, as developed from him. Of the latter class, the Valentinians are the principal representatives, as being the most considerable and numerous sect, and one, the essential characteristics of which appear throughout the systems of other theosophic Gnostics. The fundamental doctrines held in common by the Valentinians and Marcionites were the following ;—That the material world, the visible universe, was not the work of the Supreme Being, but of a far inferior agent, the Demiurgus, or the Creator,* who was also the God of the Jews ; that the spiritual world, the Pleroma, as it was called, over which the true Divinity presided, and the material world, the realm of the Creator, were widely separated from each other ; that evil was inherent in matter ; that the material world, both as being material, and as being the work of an inferior being, was full of imperfection and evil ; that the Saviour descended from the spiritual world, as a manifestation of the Supreme God, to reveal him to men, to reform the disorders here existing, and to deliver whatever is spiritual from the dominion

* *Δημιουργός*, literally the "Workman." The term "Maker," might seem the preferable rendering, except, that the associations with the word "Creator," when standing alone, correspond better with the conceptions of the Gnostics. But, in thus using the term "Creator," we must divest it of the idea of creation from nothing. There is no satisfactory evidence, that any of the Gnostics rejected the then common philosophical notion of eternal, uncreated matter.

of matter ; and that the Supreme God had been unknown to men, to Jews and Heathens equally, before his manifestation of himself by Christ. In their view, he was the God of the New Testament, and the Creator was the God of the Old Testament. They, at the same time, conceived of the Creator, as exercising a moral government over men, as dispensing rewards, and inflicting punishments. He, in their view, was "*Just.*" But the Supreme God did not punish. He was unmingled benevolence. He was "*Good.*"

In connection with these doctrines, neither the Valentinians nor the Marcionites supposed the Saviour to have had a proper human body of flesh and blood, in which corruption would have dwelt. The Valentinians, however, ascribed to him a real, though not a human body, while the Marcionites regarded his apparent body as a mere phantom. Those who maintained the latter opinion were called *Docetæ*, a name for which we may give an equivalent in the word *Apparitionists*. But this name was also, sometimes, if not commonly, extended to all who denied that Christ had a proper human body ; and, thus used, comprehended the generality of the Gnostics.

In the systems of the Marcionites and Valentinians, the Creator appears as one. Other sects, it is said, believed the material world to have been formed by angels. But, among those angels, one was generally, perhaps universally, regarded as preëminent, and as the God of the Jews ; that is, as one to whom the name *Creator* may be distinctively applied. The Valentinians themselves sometimes spoke of the Creator as an angel, and associated with him, in the government of his works, other beings whom he had produced, giving them also the name of angels.

What have been stated, were the common doctrines of the Gnostics. Their fundamental distinction may be regarded as consisting in the belief, that the material universe was not formed by the Supreme Being, but by some inferior being or

beings ; and that this being, or one of these beings, was the God of the Jews. In the writings of the earlier fathers against them, the stress of the controversy concerns this topic. It was, as we might suppose, the great point at issue between them and the catholic Christians. It is stated by Tertullian, in his work against Marcion, to be "the principal question"* between them ; and the whole tenor of his arguments shows that it was so. The principal question, he says, in commencing his work, "whence the whole controversy arises, is, Whether it be allowable to introduce two gods."† The main object of his work is to prove from reason, from the Old Testament, from the Gospels, and from the Epistles, that the Supreme Being, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the same being with the Creator of the material universe, and the God of the Jews. Irenæus is our great authority concerning the theosophic Gnostics, of whom alone he treats, to the exclusion of Marcion and his followers, for a reason to be hereafter mentioned. In the introduction to his work, he assigns, as the cause of his undertaking to

* Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 1. Opp. p. 366. ed. Priorii.

† Or, "The principal, and hence the whole controversy, is of number ; Whether it be allowable to introduce two gods." The passage referred to now stands thus ;

"Principalis itaque, exinde tota congressio, de numero ; An duos deos liceat induci, si forte poëticâ, et pictoriâ licentiâ, et tertiâ jam hæreticâ. Sed veritas Christiana districte pronuntiavit ; Deus, si non unus est, non est." Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 3. p. 366.

Perhaps it should be read thus ;

"Principalis *ita quæstio*, et inde tota congressio, de numero, An duos deos liceat induci. *Sit* forte poëticâ, et pictoriâ licentiâ, et tertiâ jam hæreticâ ; sed veritas Christiana," &c.

That *quæstio* has been lost from the text, and that *principalis* was used by Tertullian as an epithet to that word, and not to *congressio*, may appear not only from the somewhat incoherent meaning resulting from its present connection with *congressio*, but also from the last sentence of the first section. "Nam quatenus admittenda congressio est, . . . regulam adversarii prius prætexam, ne cui lateat in quâ *principalis quæstio* dimicatura est."

Then follow the words "Duos Ponticus [Marcion] deos affert ;" and after a few comments on this doctrine, Tertullian proceeds, as before quoted, "Principalis itaque, exinde tota congressio ;" or "Principalis *ita quæstio*, et inde tota congressio."

write against the heretics, that they “overturn the faith of many, leading them away, by a pretence of superior knowledge, from Him who framed and ordered the universe, as if they had something higher and better to show them, than the God who made heaven and earth, and all that is therein; bringing ruin upon their converts, by giving them injurious and irreligious sentiments toward the Creator.”* In the first book of his work, he gives an account of the opinions of the Gnostics. In his second book, he undertakes to confute them, by showing their intrinsic incredibility, and commences by saying; “It will be proper to begin with the first and principal topic, God, the Creator, whom they blaspheme, who is God and Lord alone, sole author of all, sole Father.”† In concluding the book, he affirms, that what he has been maintaining is consonant to what was taught by Christ and his apostles, by the Law and the Prophets, namely, that there is one God and Father of All, and that all things were made by him, and not by angels, nor by any other Power.‡ He then begins his third book, by proving this doctrine from the Gospels, which, he says, all teach “that there is one God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who was announced by the Prophets, and one Messiah, the Son of God.”§ In the last paragraph of this book, he prays that the heretics may not persevere in their errors, but that, being “converted to the church of God, Christ may be formed within them; and that they may know the Maker of this universe, the only true God and Lord of all.” “Thus we pray for them,” he says, “loving them better than they love themselves.” He then states, that, in his next book, he shall endeavour to induce them, by reasoning from the words of Christ, “to abstain from speaking evil of their Maker, who alone is God;” and, accordingly, in the commencement of the fourth book, he repeats similar representations of their fundamental doctrine,

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. Præf. § 1. p. 2. Ed. Massuet.

† Lib. ii. c. 1. § 1. p. 116.

‡ Lib. ii. c. 35. § 4. p. 171.

§ Lib. iii. c. 1. § 2. p. 174.

which, with others to the same effect, it is unnecessary to subjoin.

"I will endeavour," says Origen,* "to define who is a heretic. All who profess to believe in Christ, and yet affirm, that there is one God of the Law and the Prophets, and another of the Gospels, and maintain that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was not He who was proclaimed by the Law and the Prophets, but another, I know not what, God, wholly unknown and unheard of,—all such, we consider as heretics, however they may set off their doctrines with different fictions. Such are the followers of Marcion, and Valentinus, and Basilides."†

In the fifth century, Theodoret wrote a history of heresies. He speaks of the Gnostics as nearly extinct, and professes, that his accounts of them are derived from preceding writers.‡ He treats of them in his first book; and this book, he says, contains "an account of the fables of those who have imagined another Creator, and, denying that there is one principle of all things, have introduced other principles which have no existence; and who say that the Lord appeared to men in the semblance of a man only."§

Our information concerning the distinguishing doctrines common to the Gnostics in the general form in which they have been stated, is full and satisfactory; and these doctrines there is no difficulty in comprehending. But the same cannot be said of the transcendental speculations of the theosophic Gnostics. These concerned the supposed production

* Apud Pamphili Mart. Apolog. pro Origene; in Origen. Opp. iv. Append. p. 22.

† The original adds; "and those who call themselves Tethians," where, for "Tethians," I suppose we should read "Sethians," a name assumed by some of the Gnostics, who regarded Seth as the progenitor or prototype of the *spiritual* among men.

‡ See the Introduction to his "Hæreticarum Fabularum Compendium," and the Preface to the Second Book. Opp. iv. pp. 187-189, 218. Ed. Sirmond.

§ Ibid. p. 188.

from the Supreme Divinity of hypostatized * attributes and *ideas*, forming beings, whom, in common with him, they denominated Æons, or Immortals;—the full development of the Deity by those emanations, constituting the Pleroma;†—the realm of God, the Spiritual World, (in contradistinction to the *animal* and material,) which was likewise called the Pleroma; all properly spiritual existences being considered as deriving their substance from that of the Infinite Spirit;—and the mingling of spirit with matter; the causes which led to the formation of the material world, and the relations of this to the spiritual world. Their speculations on these subjects were very foreign from any conceptions with which we are familiar. They seem to have assumed no definite and permanent shape; but to have varied according to the imaginations of different sects and individuals; every one, as Tertullian says, moulding what he had received to his own liking; the disciple thinking himself as much at liberty as his master, to innovate at pleasure.‡ Nearly all the direct information concerning them, on which we can rely with any confidence, is derived from their earlier controversial opponents, the fathers of the second and third centuries; and it cannot be supposed that these writers furnish a full explanation of the theories of the Gnostics in their most intelligible and

* I use the term “hypostatize,” and its relatives, to express the ascribing of proper personality to what in its nature is devoid of it.

† Πλήρωμα, *Fullness, Completeness, Perfection*, here signifying the full, complete, perfect development of the Deity. The word, though with a change of its meaning, was borrowed by the Gnostics from St. Paul. See Ephesians, i. 23; iii. 19. Coloss. i. 19; ii. 9.

‡ Tertullian. De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 42. pp. 217, 218.—Of the sect of the Marcosians, Irenæus treats at much length, probably because they prevailed particularly in the part of Gaul where he resided. (Lib. i. c. 13. § 7. p. 65.) He concludes his account of them with saying; “But, since they disagree among themselves in doctrine and teaching, and those, who are acknowledged as the more recent, affect every day to find out something new, and to bring forth what never had been thought of before, it is hard to describe the notions of all of them.” (Lib. i. c. 21. § 5. p. 98.) The same, or nearly the same, might, I conceive, have been said of every other body of theosophic Gnostics, who were classed together as a sect.

plausible form. It was the business of the fathers to divest them of all adventitious recommendations, to remove whatever might dazzle and deceive the eye, and to show, not their coincidence with any existing forms of philosophy, but their essential errors, their intrinsic incongruity, and their opposition to reason and Scripture. They have taken them to pieces, to exhibit their defects; and it is not easy, or rather it is impossible, to restore them as they were originally put together. At the same time, clearness of thought, precision of language, and accuracy in reporting opinions, were not characteristics of the writers of that age. Beside this, the Gnostics did not understand themselves, and it was impossible, therefore, that the fathers should understand them. All these causes combine to occasion peculiar difficulty in forming a just notion of the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics. If their own writings had remained to us entire, no common acuteness would probably have been necessary to follow the process by which visionary conceptions and allegories passed into doctrines; to apprehend the state of mind, the confused mingling of imperfect, changing, and inconsistent fancies, out of which their theories arose; to determine where mysticism was brightening into meaning; or to detect what portion of truth, under some disguise or other, may have entered into and been neutralised in their composition. As in so many metaphysical and theological systems, from the age of Plato to our own, we should doubtless have found, that their dialect admitted of but a very partial translation into the universal language of common sense. With the best guidance, we should have been unable to place ourselves in the same position with the Gnostics, under the same circumstances, so as to discern the spectral illusions, which, in the dawn of Christianity, they saw pictured on the clouds, and fancied to be celestial visions. Still, even as regards their theosophic doctrines, enough may be ascertained for our purpose; perhaps all that is of importance in relation to the history of opinions, or the history of our religion. After fixing our at-

tention on them steadily, what appeared at first view altogether confused and monstrous begins to assume a form better defined ; the great features common to their systems show themselves more distinctly, and we are able to discern their likeness to other modes of opinion that have widely prevailed.

The extramundane speculations of the Gnostics have attracted particular attention, both from their very nature, and from the subtle and curious inquiries to which they have led, in attempts to disengage their meaning, and trace their relations. They present difficult, though many of them unimportant, problems, of which some may be solved by research and acuteness ; and they exhibit the human mind in one of its most extraordinary aspects. To these speculations, also, as at once the strangest and most indefensible part of the doctrines of their opponents, the attention of the fathers was particularly directed. From these causes, they have been put too prominently forward in modern accounts of the Gnostic doctrines, and the reader has been bewildered and confused among obscure and very uncertain details. Coming unacquainted to the subject, he has found himself at once presented with a phantasmagoria of strange shapes, of which he could not discern the relations or significance. Attention should be first directed to the distinctive and striking characteristics common to the Gnostics, and then to the leading ideas involved in the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics. In pursuing the inquiry further, whatever discoveries some have fancied themselves to make, we find, in truth, little information that can be confidently relied on, and few facts of any real interest.

The fathers, as has been said, were but poor interpreters of the dreams of the theosophic Gnostics. But as regards the whole history of the Gnostics, there is constant need of caution in admitting, and care in scrutinizing, the representations of their catholic opponents. What is related by the fathers concerning supposed heretics *of the first century* is

mixed with fables and improbabilities. Their fuller accounts of the more important sects of the second century, the Marcionites and Valentinians, were founded upon their writings. But there are other cases, in which it admits of no doubt, that even those of the fathers, who are our best authorities, proceeded upon common rumor and oral information, distorted, exaggerated, and unfounded. The conceptions of the Gnostics were, many of them, of such a character, that it was hardly possible, that they should be verbally stated by an unfriendly reporter, without, at least, unintentional misrepresentation. The limits of different sects were undefined, and so also were those which separated the whole body of Christian Gnostics from individuals beyond the outskirts of Christianity, with whom they were confounded. The members of a sect were held together by no creed ; their opinions on all but the essential doctrines of Gnosticism, were unfixed and changing ; and some of the speculations of the leading theosophists, it is evident, must have been little adapted to the capacity of the greater number of their professed followers, and very liable to be misunderstood and perverted, even by them. It often requires much acuteness and discrimination, as well as intellectual and moral fairness, to report correctly the system of an individual or a sect, especially when its doctrines, being involved in mysticism, present no definite ideas, even to the minds of those by whom they are held. Some of the ancient philosophers, particularly Plato, could they have had a foreknowledge of the works of their admirers and expositors, in ancient and modern times, would, I believe, have wondered greatly at much which they could, and much which they could not, understand. But the fathers did not write of the Gnostics as admiring historians. With the partial exception of Clement of Alexandria, they wrote as controvertists, whose feelings were enlisted against them. All the errors, but such as spring from intentional dishonesty, to which such controvertists are liable, are to be expected, even from those of their number, on whom alone we can rely, the

fathers of the first three centuries, or the *earlier* fathers as they may be called, by way of specific distinction. Under circumstances which furnish much less excuse, the grossest mistakes are not unfrequently committed. Thus, a German theologian of our day classes Priestley among decided atheists ;* and another, a naturalist himself, states that Locke agreed with Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume, in believing reputed miracles to be only natural events, referring in evidence of his assertion to a tract by which it is clearly disproved.† A still more remarkable error concerning that great man, is the statement, or implication, to be found, I believe, in some writers above the lowest class, that he referred the origin of all our ideas to sensation. Many similar misrepresentations might be produced ; and from such errors, committed, as it were, before our eyes, through the neglect or misuse of means of information open to all, we learn what may have been the errors of ancient writers, at a period when it was incomparably more difficult to ascertain the truth ; when all communication of knowledge from a distance was tardy and imperfect ; when oral accounts, with the misunderstandings and misrepresentations by which they are usually characterized, were often the only source of information attainable ; and when the voice of the press, which now makes itself heard on every side, to confirm truth, or to confute error, in regard to all facts that are anywhere of common notoriety, was as yet unuttered. Thus, as reporters of the history and doctrines of the Gnostics, in their obscurer ramifications, even the earlier fathers were, in a great measure, disqualified, not merely by their feelings of dislike toward those heretics, but by the great difficulty of obtaining full and correct knowledge concerning them ; and, we may add, by that want of accuracy of conception and representation, which they shared in com-

* Lehrbuch des christlichen Glaubens, von August Hahn. (Leipzig, 1828.) p. 178.

† Institutiones Theologiæ Christianæ Dogmaticæ a I. A. L. Wegscheider. § 48. not. a. p. 111. ed. 2dæ.

mon with their opponents, and with all others of their age. We must keep in view their prejudices, and their liability to mistake, not merely as respects the doctrines, but also as respects the character and morals of the Gnostics. We may readily believe, that vices, which were more properly to be ascribed to the depravity of individuals, were sometimes brought as general charges against the whole body, to which those individuals were considered as belonging; and, that the practical inferences unfavorable to morality, to be drawn from the false doctrines of the Gnostics, were represented as their common practical effects; though it is often the case, that men do not follow out in action the results of bad principles any more than of good.

In determining the truth concerning the Gnostics, we may find a concurrence of credible and contemporary testimony to what is probable in itself, and coincident or consistent with the still remaining expositions which they themselves gave of their doctrines; and consistent, also, with forms of opinions prevailing during the period when they sprung up and flourished. This testimony, so confirmed, is sufficient to establish the leading facts concerning their character and doctrines. In proceeding further, we must judge of the accounts given of them from the particular probabilities that each case may present, and especially from the consistency of those accounts with the truths concerning them, which we have found means to settle. And, throughout this whole inquiry, particular attention must be given to the very different value of those ancient writers who have treated of the Gnostics, to the period when they lived, to their means of information, to the temper and purpose with which they wrote, and to their respective characters for correctness and truth. In this respect, as we shall hereafter see, a very wide distinction is to be made between writers, who have often been indiscriminately quoted, as of equal authority in regard to the history of the Gnostics.

This subject has afforded scope for an abundance of hypotheses in modern times ; for few facts have been so well established, and so generally acknowledged, as to stand in their way. It has been a sort of disputed province between fiction and history. We may meet, on every side, with statements respecting the Gnostics altogether unfounded. Gibbon says, that they “were distinguished as the most learned, the most polite, and most wealthy of the Christian name;”^{*} but the assertion is made without proof, on his own responsibility; unless, indeed, he has repeated or exaggerated the error of some preceding modern writer, of which I am not aware. The representation is such as it may readily be supposed was not derived from their ancient controversial opponents, who alone can be referred to for information concerning the subject. No one, I think, beside Gibbon has ascribed to them the worldly distinctions of superior refinement and wealth ; but the zeal for paradoxes, which prevails among many of the theological writers of our age, has shown itself in other representations. The theosophic Gnostics, though their speculations are among the most vague and inconsequent that any visionaries have produced, have been transformed into penetrating and refined philosophers, or rather described as “equally versed in the mysteries of Platonism, of the Cabala, of the Zendavesta, and of the New Testament ; as belonging rather to the world of ideas than to that of sensations, and as manifesting the human soul in its sublime ecstasies.”[†] This is the language of a writer, who does not separate himself from the rest of the intellectual world by his general tone of thought and expression, or by any radical changes in the use of language. But one of the followers of the latest, darkest, and most repulsive school of German metaphysicians has likewise thought to do honor to the Gnostics, by claiming them as its progenitors.[‡]

^{*} Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Ch. xv. vol. ii. p. 285.

[†] Matter, *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme*. (1828.) Tom. ii. p. 281.

[‡] I refer to Baur, Professor of Gospel Theology in the University of Tubingen,

To justify such eulogies as have been bestowed on them by the writer first mentioned, their systems are professedly laid

a disciple of Hegel, and a writer of much note among his countrymen, who has published a large work relating to the Gnostics, entitled "The Christian Gnosis (or Gnosticism); or the Christian Philosophy of Religion historically Developed." (Tubingen. 8vo. 1835.) His main purpose is to represent the Gnostics as the true religious philosophers of their times, and to exhibit the resemblance of their doctrines to the latest philosophy of religion, as developed by Jacob Boehmen, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and finally by Hegel, who has brought it nearest to perfection. The fundamental doctrine, in which he regards the Gnostics as coinciding with these modern philosophers, is one which he has arbitrarily ascribed to them. According to him, they viewed God (their Supreme God) as an unconscious, impersonal, and unintelligent being. The doctrine of Hegel teaches that all individual spirits are but modifications of one universal spirit, the only positive existence in the universe. Ideas alone are things. But this universal spirit is, in itself, unconscious, and first arrives at consciousness in its developement in man. Man is the only conscious God. "The essence of religion, therefore, is the self-consciousness of God. God knows himself in a consciousness different from him, which, in itself, is the consciousness of God, but which also has reference to itself, as it knows its identity with God; an identity existing through the negation of finiteness. Thus, in one word, God is this,—to distinguish one's self, from one's self, to become objective to one's self, but, in this distinction, to be absolutely identical with one's self." These words, in which Baur reports the doctrine of Hegel on the most important of subjects, seem rather the language of a man not of sane mind, than such as accords with the character of one reputed, by many of his countrymen, to be the wisest of philosophers. I subjoin them in the original.

"Der Inhalt der Religion ist daher das Selbstbewußtseyn Gottes. Gott weiß sich in einem von ihm verschiedenen Bewußtseyn, das an sich das Bewußtseyn Gottes ist, aber auch für sich, indem es seine Identität mit Gott weiß, eine Identität, die vermittelt ist, durch die Negation der Endlichkeit. Gott ist also mit Einem Worte dieß: sich von sich zu unterscheiden, sich Gegenstand zu seyn, aber in diesem Unterschiede schlechthin mit sich identisch zu seyn." (Baur, pp. 674, 675.)

After this account of "The Christian Philosophy of Religion," which, it appears, is atheism, Baur remarks, that it is evident "how intimately this philosophy is connected with Christianity, how eagerly it transfers to itself its entire substance, nay, that, in its whole purpose, it is nothing else than a scientific explanation of the problem of historical Christianity." (pp. 709, 710.)

In the work of Baur, there is no critical examination of the history of the Gnostics, nor any information of value concerning them. He ascribes to them, not only without authority, but contrary to all evidence, the doctrine of an unconscious and impersonal God. His work, like those of many of his countrymen, exhibits an incapacity of thinking clearly and consistently, and of presenting a lucid and well-digested exposition of a subject; and is characterized by such a use of words, especially concerning the topics of religion, as would unsettle all

open ; and though the end be not obtained, though nothing wonderful appear, yet the Gnostics, could they revive, might address their expositors in words like those which Plato puts into the mouth of Theætetus, after subjecting him to the questioning of Socrates ; “ By Jupiter, you have made me say more than I had in me.” Nor has this too great ingenuity of explanation been confined to those who have formed an over-estimate of the spiritual acquirements of the Gnostics. In the developement of their opinions, it is not uncommon to find a striking contrast between the scanty or worthless materials that antiquity has left us, and the long and ready detail of a modern expositor, defining the particulars, and tracing the history, of a system. When we look for the proof of what is affirmed, we find, perhaps, straggling authorities of

their established meanings. It belongs to that class of speculative writings, of which Germany has been so fertile, treating of the most important subjects, and promulgating, sometimes with dogmatical phlegm, and sometimes with heartless flippancy, doctrines the most disastrous to faith and morals. These writings are distinguished, not so much by a want of reasoning, or an evident incapacity of reasoning, as by an apparent insensibility to its necessity or use. Every thing is assumed. The most extravagant and most pernicious theories are put forward, as if they consisted of self-evident propositions. Yet, when the metaphysician or theologian of the day brings out his new system, resting on no truths or facts, but spun from his own brain, his disciples (*les plus sots qui toujours admirent un sot*) applaud the rigid thought and profound speculations of their master ; while more intelligent readers, unaccustomed to this style of discussion without explanation or argument, are at first perplexed by a phenomenon which they cannot readily understand. These works, numerous as they are, do not belong to the literature of the world. They form a literature, if it may be so called, immiscible with any other. The speculations they contain have no alliance with those truths which human wisdom has established, or which God has revealed to us. Tennemann, the German historian of philosophy, likened the new school of German metaphysicians, as it existed in his time, to the later Platonists. Baur finds a strong resemblance between those of our day and the Gnostics. These modern metaphysicians do, in truth, belong to the age of the later Platonists and Gnostics. But they resemble them not so much through a correspondence of doctrines, as in their mystical and barbarous obscurity, in their perversion and fabrication of language, in their arrogant claims, in their contempt for the exercise of the understanding in the investigation and establishment of truth, and in their pretending to some other foundation than reason, and the revelation of God, on which to rest our highest knowledge.

doubtful credit, or uncertain application ; supposed analogies with opinions less understood than those of the Gnostics, to establish which, the mere shadows of meaning are to be tracked through the obscurity of Eastern theology, or some imaginary scheme of Egyptian superstition ; etymological conjectures ; and explanations of allegories and symbols, to which the ingenuity of the writer may give a glimmering of probability, while his page is open before us. In the words of Tertullian, *late quærentur incerta, latius disputantur præsumpta* ; “ there is a wide search after uncertainties, and a wider discussion of assumptions.” At the same time, facts that lie most open to view have been disregarded, or misrepresented, or but partially stated. In consequence, however, of all the attention which has been given to the subject, the character of the Gnostics may undoubtedly be better understood at the present day than it formerly has been. The extravagant over-estimate of them, which appears in some modern writers, is, in part, a reaction produced by the extravagant depreciation of them which preceded it. The crude accounts of the later, as well as earlier, fathers, have formerly been received without discrimination, and without any attempt to disengage the truth from the language of controversy, or from the mass of falsehood, in which it was enveloped, and consequently without any exercise of judgment on the respective credibility of the authorities adduced. The charges made against them by the later, as well as earlier, fathers, whether probable or not, have been repeated without examination by theological bigotry, which, connecting with the name of heretic the ideas of folly, immorality, and impiety, has given itself full scope in ascribing these bad qualities to the Gnostics. Even more sober and judicious writers have spoken of their systems, as if they had just appeared, instead of having been produced many centuries ago ; and have rather compared them with an abstract standard of what they themselves deemed sound philosophy, than viewed them relatively to the erroneous conceptions of ancient times. Their

proper rank has not been assigned them among the other forms of metaphysical and religious belief, equally false and irrational, which have been, or still are, extensively received. But the Gnostics were neither prodigies of wisdom nor folly. There was nothing peculiar in the character of their minds to distinguish them from numerous theorists of their own and other times. With the exception of the Marcionites, they belonged to the large class of the professors of hidden but intuitive wisdom, who exhibit to the ignorant, bits of colored glass, with the air of men displaying inestimable jewels. The most eminent among them were probably far inferior to some of their opponents, to such men as Tertullian and Origen, in vigor and clearness of intellect, and in that intense conviction of the truths of religion, which at once implies a sound judgment and tends to perfect it; but I do not know that they would appear to much disadvantage, if brought into comparison with the later Platonists of the third and fourth centuries.*

* Tertullian commences his treatise "Against the Valentinians" with a remarkable passage, which, though of some length, it may be worth while to quote. It forms an amusing contrast with that before given from a modern author, (Matter,) p. 25, and is, I doubt not, somewhat less distant from the truth. The representation of Tertullian carries with it a degree of intrinsic probability, whatever allowance is to be made for the roughness of his language. He says;

"The Valentinians, who are the most numerous body among the heretics, because they consist, in great part, of apostates, and are given to fables, and in fear of no discipline, care about nothing more than to conceal what they teach, if men can be said to teach what they conceal. Secrecy is made a matter of conscience. Confusion is taught under the name of religion. In those Eleusinian mysteries, which are a branch of the Attic superstition, what is kept secret is shameful. So the access is made difficult, the initiation is long, a seal is put on the lips; a discipline of five years is required, that suspense may build up a high opinion of what is to be known, and its grandeur, when revealed, may appear proportional to the curiosity excited. Then follows the obligation of silence. What has been so tardily attained must be carefully guarded. Yet, after all the longings of the initiated, after the sealing of their lips, the whole divinity revealed in the sanctuary is an obscene image. But an allegory, holding forth the venerable name of Nature, is forced to sanction the figure; obscuring the sacrilege, and excusing the infamy by false similitudes. In like manner, the heretics, of whom we speak, dressing up the idlest and vilest fictions with holy names, and titles, and argu-

The Gnostics and Ebionites, as has been remarked, were the principal heretics of the first two centuries. They were both divided from the communion of catholic Christians. The Ebionites, belonging to what, in their view, was the privileged race of the Jews, kept aloof from the Gentile converts; and, among the Gnostics, the Marcionites formed separate churches of their own.* The theosophic Gnostics, it is probable, likewise had their separate religious assemblies, unless they were prevented by the smallness of their numbers, or by what they regarded as a philosophical indifference to outward forms of religion. Tertullian, however, says generally of the heretics, that, "for the most part, they have no churches; motherless, without a settled habitation, bereaved of faith, outcasts, they wander about without a home."† An open separation between the Gnostics and the catholic Christians

ments, drawn from true religion,—the divine love and abundance [the abundance in the Scriptures] affording ready opportunity, since, from much, much may be cut away,—have, for a lure, made Eleusinian mysteries of their own, sacred only as buried in silence, celestial through taciturnity alone. If you inquire of them in good faith, they compose their countenances, and raise their eyebrows, and say, 'It is a high matter.' If you question them subtilely, they prevaricate and assert the common faith in ambiguous language. If you show that you understand them, they deny their doctrines. If you come to close conflict, they put on an appearance of foolish simplicity when defeated. They do not commit themselves to their own disciples before they have secured them. They have the art of persuading before they teach. But truth persuades by teaching; it does not teach by persuasion.

"So we are regarded as simple by them, simple only, not wise; as if wisdom must be disjoined from simplicity, the Lord having united them."

The text of this passage of Tertullian appears to be best given by Rigault (p. 250 of Le Prieur's edition). But, as regards a few words to which I cannot assign a probable meaning, I have rendered them, as perhaps they may be amended by conjecture, thus;

"Sed naturæ venerandum nomen allegorica dispositio prætendens, patrocínio coactæ [*f. coacta*] figuræ, sacrilegium obscurat, et conviciū falsi [*f. falsis*] simulacris excusat."

"—facili charitati ex [*f. charitatis et*] divinæ copię occasione, quia de multis multa succedere est [*f. succidere vel succedere: conject. Rigalt.*]."

* Tertullian. *Advers. Marcion*. Lib. iv. c. 5. pp. 415, 416.

† De *Præscript. Hæretic.* c. 42. p. 218.

was produced, on the one hand, by the pride of the Gnostics in their peculiar opinions, and by their regarding themselves as the only spiritual believers, and all beside as lying in darkness; and, on the other hand, by the strong dislike which the great body of Christians entertained for their doctrines and pretensions, and by the brief profession of faith (the origin of what was afterwards called "The Apostles' Creed") required of a catechumen, after passing his noviciate, before admission to the communion. The Gnostics, however, sometimes represented their exclusion from the church as unjust. Irenæus says of the Valentinians; "For the sake of making converts of those of the church, they address discourses to the multitude, by which they delude and entice the more simple, imitating our modes of expression to induce them to become more frequent hearers, and complaining to them of us, that, when they think as we do, say the same things and hold the same doctrine, we abstain without reason from their communion, and call them heretics."* Till toward the middle of the third century, when *the* heretics were spoken of in general terms, the Gnostics alone were for the most part intended. Thus, for example, Clement of Alexandria sets forth his design to "show to all the heretics, that there is one God and Lord omnipotent clearly proclaimed by the Law and the Prophets, in connection with the blessed Gospel:"† a proposition requiring to be proved only against the Gnostics. So also Irenæus, in the Preface to his fourth book, disregarding his own previous mention of the Ebionites, speaks of all heretics as "teaching blasphemy against our Maker and Preserver." ‡

But, in considering the subject of the early heretics, it is to be remarked, that among the catholic Christians, their contemporaries, there was great freedom of speculation, and

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. iii. c. 15. § 2. p. 203.

† Stromat. iv. § 1. p. 564. Ed. Potter.

‡ Cont. Hæres. Lib. iv. Præf. § 4. p. 228.

great diversity of opinion, till after the time of Origen. Probably no standard of orthodoxy was generally received, much more comprehensive than what has been called the Apostles' Creed; and the opinions of no individual writer were conformable to any of the standards which have been since established. In comparing Tertullian with Origen, the one, the most eminent defender of the common faith among the Greeks, and the other among the Latins, and both, after their death, reputed as heretics, we find in them not only a wholly different cast of mind and temper, but speculations at once very remote from what is the general belief of Christians at the present day, and diverse from, and opposite to, one another. The author of the Clementine Homilies seems, in ancient times, to have escaped the imputation of being a heretic; yet, among other doctrines, widely different from the more common faith, he brought forward a theory, to be elsewhere noticed, respecting the Jewish Law and the Old Testament, in opposition to the Gnostics, which approached little nearer than their own to the opinions afterwards established. Tertullian wrote warmly against Hermogenes, who maintained that evil had its origin in eternal and unoriginated matter. Yet Hermogenes does not appear to have been separate from the communion of the catholic church; and probably not a few other catholic Christians held, in common with him, a doctrine so prevalent in Pagan philosophy. It may be observed, that Hermogenes gave his name to no sect, which seems to show, that there was nothing extraordinary in his opinions being held by a Christian. Tertullian also wrote against Praxeas, who opposed the speculations which had been introduced concerning the proper personality of the Logos. His zeal was inflamed by the circumstance, that Praxeas had been an opponent of the Montanists, of which sect Tertullian had become a member. But he tells us, that the greater part of Christians, "the simple, not to say the unwise and ignorant," favored the opinions of Praxeas.*

* *Advers. Praxeam.* c. 3. p. 502.

And, to mention but one other example, there is no ground for supposing, that Tertullian himself, after becoming a Montanist, was rejected from the communion of the catholic church; though it is true, that the Montanists were soon regarded as a heresy separated from it.

The state of Christians, then, during the second century, presents a very remarkable appearance. By the side of the great body of Gentile Christians, among whom such freedom of speculation prevailed, we find another smaller body of Gentile Christians, the Gnostics, agreeing with the former in acknowledging Christ as a divine teacher, but separated from them by an impassable gulf, as holding doctrines which rendered the amalgamation of the two parties impossible. Notwithstanding some striking analogies between their speculations, there was no gradual transition from one system to the other. The separation was abrupt and broad. It consisted in the fundamental doctrine of the Gnostics, that the Creator, or the principal Creator, of the universe, the God of the Jews, was not the Supreme Divinity and the God of Christians. Their scheme, without doubt, is to be regarded, in part, as a crude attempt to solve the existence of evil in the world, a subject which engaged their attention in common with that of other religious theorists of their age. But the desire to solve this problem was not, I conceive, the principal occasion of the existence of Gnosticism. This, I think, is to be found in the hereditary aversion of Gentiles to Judaism; in the traditionary views of the Old Testament, communicated by the Jews from whom it was received; and in the impossibility, which the Gnostics found of reconciling the conceptions of God that it presents, with their moral feelings, and with those conceptions of him which they had derived from Christianity. Nor, in this respect, did they stand alone. A large portion, we know not how large, of the catholic Christians, including some of the most eminent and intellectual of their number, equally regarded much in the Jewish Law and history as irreconcilable with correct morality and

just notions of God, if understood in its literal sense. They, however, as we shall hereafter see, took a very different course from that of the Gnostics, in escaping from the difficulty with which they were pressed.

Regarding the aversion of the Gentiles to Judaism as the principal occasion of Gnosticism, we may readily understand why the whole body of early heretics among the Gentile converts became Gnostics. As soon as men's attention was distinctly fixed upon the subject, nothing but a thorough and strongly operative faith in Christianity could enable a Gentile Christian to subdue the prejudices, and overcome the difficulties, which stood in the way of his acknowledging the Old Testament to have the divine authority that was claimed for it.

To the opinions of the Gnostics, respecting Judaism, we shall recur hereafter. But other topics must be first attended to. I shall next give some view of the external history of the Gnostics, in connection with an account of those writings from which our information concerning them is to be derived.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE EXTERNAL HISTORY OF THE GNOSTICS, AND THE
SOURCES OF INFORMATION CONCERNING THEM.

IRENÆUS pretends, that all the Gnostics derived their existence from Simon, the magician of Samaria, who is mentioned in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. He says, that "all heresies had their origin in him;"—that he was "the father of all heretics."* All those, he says, who in any way corrupt the truth, or mar the preaching of the church, are disciples and successors of Simon, the Samaritan magician; although, as he honestly adds, "they do not acknowledge him as their master."† The same representation of Simon appears in other, succeeding fathers. But the information of Irenæus and his contemporaries, concerning particular personages and events in the history of Christianity during the first century, except so far as it was derived from the New Testament, was very imperfect and uncertain; and their accounts of Simon are not to be implicitly received.

But there is no doubt, that there was, in the first century, a Simon, a Samaritan, a pretender to divine authority and supernatural powers, who, for a time, had many followers, who stood in a certain relation to Christianity, and who may have held some opinions more or less similar to those of the Gnostics. Justin Martyr mentions him and his followers several times, but gives no account of his doctrines. He only states, that he deceived men by magical arts, and that almost all the Samaritans (the countrymen of Justin) "acknowledged and worshipped him as the First God," "over all rule, au-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 23. § 2. p. 99. Lib. iii. Præf. p. 173. Lib. ii. Præf. p. 115.

† Lib. i. c. 7. § 4. p. 106.

thority, and power ;” and affirmed, that a woman, whom he carried about with him, named Helena, was the first (hypos-tatized) conception of his, that is, of the divine mind.* These opinions seem to imply an annihilation of common sense in his followers ; but they admit, as we shall see, of some explanation, that may serve to reconcile them to our apprehensions. Justin does not identify the Simon of whom he speaks with the Simon mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles ;† and, in modern times, some of the learned have contended that they were different individuals. But Luke describes the Simon, whom he mentions, as practising magical arts, so as to deprive the Samaritan nation of their senses, and as declaring himself to be some great personage ; and he adds, that all, high and low, affirmed him to be the Power of God, called Great.‡ When we compare Luke’s account with that of Justin, it appears incredible, that the two writers should be speaking of two different individuals, who bore the same name, who were conspicuous in the same country, Samaria, and who likewise were contemporaries ; for Justin says of the Simon whom he mentions, that he was at Rome during the reign of Claudius. Believing the accounts of both, therefore, to relate to the same person, we may observe that Simon, according to Luke, suffered himself to be regarded as a manifestation of what was probably considered as the highest Power of God. From this, it was an easy transition for his followers to speak of him as a manifestation of God, or as God made manifest to men, and thus to represent him as God himself. I have here supposed this account to have been given of him by his followers. Some of the fathers subsequent to Justin affirm, that Simon himself claimed to be God. But this was not unlikely to be said, if his adherents

* I. Apolog. p. 38, seqq. p. 84. II. Apolog. p. 134. Dial. cum Tryph. p. 397. Ed. Thirlby.

† Ch. viii. 9-24.

‡ Acts, viii. 9, 10. In the tenth verse, I adopt the reading, Οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη.

so regarded him ; for the later opinions of a sect were not uncommonly ascribed to its founder. But, if Simon did use such language concerning himself, it may still be explained in a similar manner. In the assertions, which he or his followers made concerning Helena, there was, I conceive, a like vague use of words ; but, through the strange accounts given of her, which it is not worth while to detail, we may perhaps discern, that she was regarded as the symbol, or the manifestation, of that portion of spirituality, which (according to a common conception of the Gnostics) had become entangled in matter, and for the liberation of which the interposition of the Deity was required.

From all the notices of Simon, it does not seem likely that he much affected the character of a speculative philosopher or theologian, or was solicitous to establish any system of doctrines. He appears to have been a bold, artful, vainglorious, dishonest adventurer, claiming to possess supernatural powers, and having much skill in obtaining control over the minds of others. In Josephus, there is mention of a Simon, pretending to be a magician, who, somewhere about twenty years after the events recorded in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, was employed by Felix, then Procurator of Judæa, to persuade Drusilla, the wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, to forsake her husband and marry Felix ; which Drusilla was prevailed on to do.* It is not improbable, that this was the same Simon who is spoken of by St. Luke. Whether he were so or not, the Simon connected with the early history of Christianity may be classed with certain impostors and fanatics, not uncommon in the age in which he lived, who, proceeding on the doctrines of the Pythagorean Platonists (as they may be called), pretended, through mystical exercises of mind, to have attained a communion with the invisible world, and to possess a power, which they denominated *theurgy*, of performing supernatural works by divine assistance. He may be compared with his contemporary, Apollonius of Tyana,

* Josephi Antiq. Lib. xx. c. 7. § 2.— Drusilla is mentioned, Acts xxiv. 24.

whose works Hierocles, an early enemy of Christianity, represented as equalling or excelling those of our Lord ; or with a somewhat later impostor, Alexander, the Paphlagonian prophet, on whom Lucian poured out his invective. Like pretensions to magical power were common among the other extravagances of the later Platonists. Plotinus, the most eminent of the sect, was, according to the account of his disciple Porphyry (famous for his work against Christianity), a great theurgist ; and Proclus, than whom none of these philosophers had more alacrity in diving into the deepest and darkest mysteries, is said, by his friend and biographer, Marinus, to have been able to bring rain from heaven, to stop earthquakes, and to expel diseases. Simon had learned in a similar school ; and though he was, probably, more of an impostor than a fanatic, yet a religious impostor can hardly be very successful without a mixture of fanaticism. If he succeed in deceiving others, he commonly succeeds, partially at least, in deceiving himself. The false opinion, which he creates in those about him, reacts on his own mind. Simon, we may suppose, like the generality of men in his age, was a believer in the power of magic, or theurgy ; and, when he saw the miracles performed by Philip, was filled with astonishment, and regarded him as operating through magical powers unknown to himself. Giving credit, at the same time, to the accounts of the miracles of Jesus, he probably thought him to have been a great theurgist ; and wished to become possessed of the secrets, which he imagined him to have communicated to his disciples. Being confirmed in this state of mind by witnessing the effects produced by the imposition of the hands of the Apostles, he did what naturally occurred to him, he offered money to purchase their disclosure. He was at first humbled and terrified by the severe rebuke of Peter ; but no evil immediately followed ; and it appears, from the further accounts of him, that he resumed confidence, pursued his former course of life, and was excited to set himself up as a rival of our Lord.

Of the particular events of his subsequent life, little is known. It is not probable that he left any writings behind him.* Justin Martyr says, that he visited Rome, and there displayed his pretended magical powers.† Irenæus relates, that he was honored by many as a God; and that images of him and Helena, the former fashioned as Jupiter, and the latter as Minerva, were worshipped by his followers;‡ and Justin says, that there was, at Rome, a statue dedicated to him as a God.§

The history of Simon is an object of interest from the mention of him by St. Luke, and from his early connection with Christianity. The accounts of him, however, afford no means of determining, with any particularity and assurance, what opinions he put forward. But, whatever he taught or affirmed, he did not rest his doctrine on the authority of Christ. Him he emulated; he was not his disciple. The only ground on which his followers might be confounded with Christians, is indicated in an account of Irenæus, that Simon “taught, that it was he himself who had appeared among the Jews as the Son, had descended as the Father in Samaria, and had visited other nations as the Holy Spirit.”|| Conformably to what

* About the end of the fourth century, Jerome, in a single passage (Opp. iv. P. I. col. 114), speaks of books written by Simon; “Qui se magnam dicebat esse Dei virtutem; hæc quoque inter cætera in suis voluminibus scripta dimittens; ‘Ego sum sermo Dei; ego sum speciosus, ego Paracletus, ego omnipotens, ego omnia Dei.’” Except as a mystical expression of Pantheism, the passage is somewhat too blasphemous for one readily to believe it to have been written by any man in his senses. In regard to books *ascribed* to Simon, if such really existed in Jerome’s time, he is far too late an authority to afford any proof of their genuineness; and such books are mentioned by no preceding writer. Beausobre (Histoire du Manichéisme, i. 259, 260) maintains, what I doubt not is true, that Jerome did not take his pretended quotation from any work of Simon, nor any work which had been commonly believed to be Simon’s; though in doing so, he has destroyed the only evidence for the opinion, which he himself expresses, that Simon wrote books explanatory of his doctrine. (Ibid. p. 259.)

† I. Apolog. p. 39.

‡ Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 23. §§ 1, 4. pp. 99, 100.

§ See Additional Note, A.

|| Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 23. § 1. p. 99.

has been before remarked, that the later opinions of a sect were often ascribed to its founder, I suppose this, or something like this, to have been said, not by Simon, but by some of his followers. Representing him as the Great Power of God, manifested in all divine communications to men, and reckoning Christianity among these communications, they thus brought themselves into some relation to it. But I imagine them to have been held together as a sect, rather by the admiration of his supposed powers, by the worship of him as a divinity, or the Divinity, and by the study and practice of magical arts, than by the profession of any system of doctrines. However numerous they may at one time have been, they soon dwindled away. Origen charges Celsus with error for speaking of the Simonians as a Christian sect. That writer "was not aware," he says, "that they are far from acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God; but affirm that Simon was the Power of God. They relate various marvels of their master, who thought, that, if he could acquire such powers as he believed Jesus to possess, he should have as great influence over men."* In another place, he expresses the opinion, that in his time there were not more than thirty Simonians in the world; he says, that a very few were living in Palestine (the successors, we may presume, of his first Samaritan followers), but that generally, wherever the name of Simon was known, it was through the mention of him in the Acts of the Apostles.† Elsewhere he speaks of the sect as having ceased to exist. "There are no Simonians," he says, "remaining in the world; though Simon, in order to draw after him a greater number of followers, relieved them from the danger of death, to which Christians were taught to expose themselves, by teaching them to regard the worship of idols, as a matter of indifference."‡ They worshipped, as we have seen, images of Simon and Helena. Irenæus says, what is altogether pro-

* Cont. Cels. Lib. v. n. 62. Opp. i. 625, 626.

† Ibid. Lib. i. n. 57. pp. 372, 373.

‡ Ibid. Lib. vi. n. 11. p. 638.

bable, that they were men of loose lives, devoted to the study of magic;* and their magical discipline was connected, according to Tertullian,† with paying religious service to angels.

Such, I believe, is the amount of all that can be known, or probably conjectured, concerning Simon and his followers. But, beside the historical notices of him, he is introduced as a principal personage into an ancient work of fiction, called the Clementine Homilies. This work throws some light on the history and character of Gnosticism; and I have given some account of it, in a note at the end of this volume.‡ But no one would pretend, that it is of any authority as regards the history of Simon; and I have there endeavoured to show, that it is of no authority as regards any doctrines he may have held.

Our information being so imperfect and uncertain concerning Simon, the most noted among all, either antichristians, or heretics, of the first century, we may be prepared for the obscurity and doubt, which cloud over the history of other individuals, and of supposed heretical sects, during the same period. Menander, another Samaritan, is said to have been the successor of Simon, and to have claimed, like him, to be one of the Powers of God, manifested for the salvation of men; § and some stories remain of an individual, called Dositheus, who, Origen says, pretended to be the Jewish Messiah.|| We may conclude, perhaps, from these accounts, that, about the time of Simon, there were other less noted

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 23. § 4. p. 100.

† De Præscript. Hæret. c. 33. p. 214.

‡ See Additional Note, B.

§ Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 23. § 5. p. 100.

|| Cont. Cels. Lib. i. n. 57. Opp. i. 372. Dositheus is elsewhere spoken of by Origen, in several places; but is not mentioned by Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, or Tertullian.—It may here be observed, that the short account of heresies published in the editions of Tertullian, at the end of his book, De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, is not the work of that father. In this account, Dositheus is spoken of.

impostors of a similar character. These, together with him, may be considered as antichristian, not heretical.

Among the reputed heretics of the first century, using the word *heretic* in its modern sense, there is none of whom the notices are adapted to excite any considerable degree of interest or curiosity, except Cerinthus. Cerinthus is represented by Irenæus, who first mentions him, as a Gnostic leader, contemporary with St. John. He taught, according to Irenæus, that the world was not formed by the Supreme God, but by a certain Power, widely separated from him, and ignorant of his existence. He supposed Jesus not to have been born of a virgin, but of Joseph and Mary. He regarded him as having been distinguished from other men by superior wisdom and virtue. Into him, at his baptism, he believed that Christ descended, from "that Principality which is over all," (the Pleroma,) in the form of a dove; and that then he announced the Unknown Father, and performed miracles. At the crucifixion, Christ, who was spiritual and impassible, re-ascended from Jesus, and Jesus suffered alone. He alone died, and rose from the dead.* Irenæus also relates an idle tale, which, he says, some had heard from Polycarp, that John, while residing at Ephesus, on going to bathe, found Cerinthus in the building, and rushed out, exclaiming, "Let us fly; lest the bath should fall upon us; Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, being within." † He further supposes, that one purpose of John in writing his Gospel was to confute the errors of Cerinthus.‡

In the account given by Irenæus, of the doctrines of Cerinthus, there is nothing, perhaps, intrinsically improbable; and from this account it would appear, that Cerinthus held the characteristic doctrines of the Gnostics. But the Roman

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 26. § 1. p. 105.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. iii. c. 3. § 4. p. 177.—The same story is told by Epiphanius, not of Cerinthus, but of Ebion. Hæres. xxx. § 28. pp. 148, 149.

‡ Lib. iii. c. 11. § 1. p. 188.

presbyter, Caius, contemporary with Irenæus, represents him as a believer in a millennium, in which sensual pleasures were to be enjoyed, and affirms him to have been the author of a certain book, which Caius so describes, as to leave, I think, little doubt that he intended the Apocalypse. He speaks of Cerinthus as one "who, in Revelations, written under the name of a great apostle, introduced forged accounts of marvels, which he pretended had been shown him by angels; and taught, that, after the resurrection, there was to be an earthly reign of Christ; and that men, dwelling in Jerusalem, would again become slaves to the lusts and pleasures of the flesh." * In the last half of the third century, Dionysius of Alexandria, referring probably to this passage, says, that some of those before him had ascribed the Apocalypse to Cerinthus, regarding it as an unintelligible and incoherent book; and he himself assigns to Cerinthus the same Jewish notions concerning the millennium, which Caius had represented him as holding.† In the account of Irenæus, Cerinthus appears as an early Gnostic; but the expectation of a millennial reign of Christ had its origin in the belief of the Jews, antecedent to Christianity, concerning the temporal reign of their Messiah. The doctrine was Jewish in its origin and character, and altogether foreign from the conceptions of the Gnostics. They could not but revolt at the idea of assigning to their Christ a glorious reign on this earth, which, in their view, was the dwelling-place of imperfection and evil, over followers re-clothed in what they regarded as the pollution of flesh. But, according to Irenæus, Cerinthus coincided with the Gnostics in holding their essential doctrines of an Unknown God, of an ignorant and imperfect Creator, and of the necessity of a divine interposition through Christ, de-

* Ἄλλὰ καὶ Κήρινθος, ὁ δι' ἀποκαλύψεων ὡς ὑπὸ ἀποστόλου μεγάλου γεγραμμένων τεραταλογίας ἡμῖν ὡς δι' ἀγγέλων αὐτῷ δεδειγμένους ψευδόμενος ἐπεισάγει, λέγων, μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἐπίγειον εἶναι τὸ βασίλειον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ. τ. λ. Apub. Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib. iii. c. 28.

† Ibid. et Lib. viii. c. 25.

ascending from the pure world of spirits. Agreeing with them thus far, he could hardly but have agreed with them in their views of the millennium. This doctrine was ascribed to him in connection with the supposed authorship of the Apocalypse. But the strongly-marked character of the Apocalypse is such as to render it impossible, that it should have been written by a Gnostic, or by one holding the doctrines that Irenæus attributes to Cerinthus. The supposition would have been too glaring an absurdity, to have been made by Caius, or countenanced by Dionysius. They, therefore, did not regard him as holding those doctrines. On the other hand, they not improbably considered him as an Ebionite, according to one part of the representation, which, as we shall see, was given by Epiphanius concerning him.

Cerinthus is not named (and the fact is of importance in forming a judgment concerning his history) by Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, or Origen. From this, we may conclude, that he was not particularly conspicuous in the first century ; that he left no reputation which had made a deep impression on the minds of men ; that there was no considerable body of heretics bearing his name in the second and third centuries ; and that no writings of his were extant of any celebrity. Probably there were none whatever ; for, except a story of Epiphanius about a pretended gospel, which we shall elsewhere have occasion to examine, none are referred to by any writer.

Justin Martyr, as has been mentioned, does not name Cerinthus. On the contrary, he implies his ignorance of any individuals who separated the man Jesus and the Æon Christ in the manner in which Cerinthus and his followers are said to have done by Irenæus. In a passage, in which he is speaking of the Gnostics generally, and in which he particularly mentions the names of the leading sects, he describes them as “not teaching the doctrines of Christ, but those of the spirits of delusion ;” yet “professing themselves to be Christians, and professing that Jesus who was crucified was

the Lord and Christ.”* According to the account of Irenæus, Cerinthus and his followers could have made no such profession. The distinction, that was in fact supposed by the theosophic Gnostics between the Æon Christ, and the man Jesus, Justin, if it existed in his day, overlooked; and it could hardly, therefore, have been a doctrine that had its origin in the first century, when Cerinthus is said to have lived.

Of this reputed heretic, we have further notices in Epiphanius; † but with that writer we enter the region of fable. After repeating, in effect, the brief account of Irenæus, he subjoins, that Cerinthus was a zealot for the Mosaic Law; ‡ though, with a disregard of probability common enough in his stories, he states at the same time, that Cerinthus “affirmed that the giver of the Law was not good.”§ Epiphanius, among other fictions, pretends that he was a leader of those Jewish Christians, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, who contended that the Gentile converts must be circumcised. He thus ascribes to him the two opposite heresies of the Gnostics and the Ebionites. It may be noted, also, as remarkable even among the blunders of Epiphanius, that he first follows Irenæus in stating the belief of Cerinthus to have been, that Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ returned to the Pleroma, || and shortly after asserts, that Cerinthus “dared to affirm that Christ suffered and was crucified, and was not yet raised, but would rise in the general resurrection.”¶ He concludes by expressing his uncertainty whether Cerinthus and Merinthus were the same or two different heretics.

From the contradictory accounts of Cerinthus; from the

* Dial. cum. Tryph. p. 207.

† Hæres. xxviii. Opp. i. 110, seqq.

‡ Ibid. pp. 110-113.

§ Φάσκει γὰρ τὸν νόμον δεδοκῶτα οὐκ ἀγαθόν. Ibid. p. 111. Such a representation, says Massuet, the Benedictine editor of Irenæus, hardly obtains credit with men in their senses, *vix fidem apud sobrios obtinet*. See his *Dissertatio prima* in Libb. Irenæi. De Cerintho. n. 127. p. 53.

|| Hæres. xxviii. p. 111.

¶ Ibid. p. 113.

silence respecting him of the four Christian writers of highest eminence during the period in which they lived, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen; from the implication of Justin, that he knew of no heretics holding such opinions as Irenæus ascribes to Cerinthus; and from the fables which Epiphanius has connected with his name, we may infer that very little was certainly known concerning him. Of the stories relating to him, it may seem the most probable solution, that there was a heretic of that name in the first century, of whom little or no information had been preserved, except that he was a heretic; and that, it not being certainly known in what his error consisted, Cerinthus had, hence, the ill-fortune to have ascribed to him divers contradictory heresies, which different writers supposed to have had their origin in that early period, and was sometimes made a Gnostic, sometimes an Ebionite, and sometimes a millennarian, and the forger of the Apocalypse.

From the fathers, we can derive no information concerning the existence of Gnostics in the first century, more satisfactory than what has been stated. It has been thought, however, that there are references to them in the New Testament itself; and this is a subject that has been much discussed. It may be, that they are referred to in what has been called the Second Epistle of Peter, and in the Epistle ascribed to Jude. But these writings were not generally acknowledged by the early Christians as the works of those apostles; and we have no reason to assign them an earlier date than the first half of the second century. There seems to me no good reason for believing that Gnostics are taken notice of in any genuine writing of an apostle; nor, I may here add, do I think it probable, that any Gnostic system had been formed, or any Gnostic sect was in existence, before the end of the first century.

In the Epistles of St. Paul, the false teachers and the false doctrines, that he refers to, were for the most part evidently of Jewish origin. Nor do I perceive in them an allusion to

any peculiar doctrine of the Gnostics. When we keep in mind what those peculiar doctrines were,—the introduction of an Unknown God;—the ascribing of the creation, and of the origin of the Jewish religion, to an imperfect being or beings;—the representing of Christ as a manifestation of the Unknown God, or a messenger from him, who merely used Jesus as an organ for his communications, or had only the unsubstantial semblance of a human body;—and the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics, founded on hypostatizing the ideas and attributes of God;—when we recollect what were the characteristic doctrines of the Gnostics, we shall perceive, I think, that there is no reference to them in those passages, in which St. Paul has been supposed, by some, to have had them in view. The strong, general language in which he sometimes speaks of the false teachers of his day, though often sufficiently applicable to a portion of the Gnostics, as it is to false teachers of later times, contains nothing by which those heretics are particularly designated. Had St. Paul been acquainted with any professed expounders of Christianity, who were attempting to introduce *the* fundamental doctrine of the Gnostics, the doctrine of an Unknown God, different from the God of the Jews, his Epistles would have left no shadow of uncertainty respecting the fact. On this ground I think it may be determined from them, that no heretics of such a character existed in his time.

Nor does it appear probable, that the Gnostics are referred to by St. John, in the introduction to his Gospel. The passage has been explained, as if the apostle alluded to a scheme, like that of Valentinus, concerning the derivation of *Æons* from the Supreme Being. But there seems no reason to suppose, that such a scheme existed in the time of the apostle. Valentinus, who did not appear till somewhere about thirty years later, is represented as the author of the scheme taught by him, with which the language of St. John has been compared. The names which Valentinus gave to some of his thirty *Æons* correspond to names found in the introduction

of St. John's Gospel ; but it is more probable, that they were suggested to him partly by this introduction, than that the apostle referred to them as already employed by Gnostics. The Valentinians made use of the passage in question, and accommodated it to their opinions, as they did the rest of the New Testament, as far as was in their power.

It has been especially thought, that St. John, in his first Epistle, animadverts either on the opinion existing in the second century among the theosophic Gnostics, that the man Jesus was to be distinguished from the Æon Christ, as a distinct agent ; which was connected with the doctrine, that Jesus had not a proper human body of flesh and blood ; or, on the opinion of the Docetæ, that the apparent body of Jesus was a mere phantom. He has been supposed to do so in the passage in which he says ; “ Every spirit [that is, every teacher] professing that Jesus is the Messiah [or Christ] *come in the flesh*, is from God ; and every spirit which professes not Jesus, is not from God.” * But it seems to me most probable, that the apostle merely had in view individuals, who denied that Jesus was the Messiah, and objected, that the Messiah would not have come, as Jesus had done, to lead a life of hardship, and die a cruel and ignominious death ; that he would not have “ come in the flesh,” that is, exposed to all the accidents and sufferings of humanity. Perhaps, however, by the Messiah's “ coming in the flesh,” St. John meant nothing more, than that he had “ appeared in the world,” that he had “ appeared among men.” That the words were not essential to the main idea which he wished to express is evident from his omitting them in a corresponding passage, where he likewise refers to the false teachers to whom Christians were exposed, and where he simply describes them as “ denying that Jesus is the Messiah.” † In this

* 1 John iv. 2, 3. I omit, with Griesbach and other critics, the words in the last clause, answering to those italicized in what follows ; “ And every spirit which professes not *that Jesus has come in the flesh* is not from God.”

† 1 John ii. 22.

passage, if in either, one might suppose him to have had Christian heretics in view, for he says, that those of whom he speaks had separated themselves from the body of Christians;* but it seems clear, that he did not here refer to individuals, as holding any Gnostic doctrine, but to proper apostates and unbelievers.

It may appear, therefore, that little or nothing can be inferred from any authentic source to prove the existence of Gnostic systems or sects during the first century.† The accounts relating to supposed Gnostics by Irenæus and others, as we have seen in the case of Cerinthus, will not bear the test of examination; or relate, as in the case of Simon Magus and Menander, not to Christian heretics, but to antichristian impostors. But we are now about to quit the uncertain ground, over which we have hitherto made our way, and enter on a somewhat more open road. In the earlier part of the second century, light breaks in upon us, and individuals and systems distinctly appear. We likewise find evidence to confirm the conclusion to which we have arrived, that the Gnostics did not before this time make their appearance.

There is no dispute that the leading sects of the Gnostics, that is to say, the Valentinians and the Marcionites, with whom the Basilidians may perhaps be classed,‡ had their

* "They have gone out from us." 1 John ii. 19.

† In treating of the heretics of the first century, I, of course, make no use of the pretended Epistles of Ignatius, of the character of which I have spoken in the preceding volume. Jerome (*Advers. Luciferianos*, Opp. iv. P. ii. col. 304), in a declamatory passage, full, as I conceive, of misstatements, asserts, that "while the apostles were still living, while the blood of Christ was still recent in Judæa, it was maintained that the body of Christ was a phantom." But the authority of such a writer, at the end of the fourth century, is of no weight. Gibbon, however, twice imitates the passage of Jerome, and repeats his assertion. (*History of the Roman Empire*, Ch. xxi. Vol. iii. p. 120, and Ch. xlvii. Vol. viii. p. 266.)

‡ Origen, when speaking generally of the Gnostics, often mentions these three sects in connection, as representatives of their body. The Basilidians, like the Valentinians, were theosophic Gnostics, whom we shall have occasion to consider more particularly hereafter.

origin after the close of the first century. "Subsequently to the teaching of the apostles," says Clement of Alexandria, "about the reign of Adrian [A.D. 117-138] appeared those who devised heretical opinions, and they continued to live till that of the elder Antoninus [A.D. 138-161]. Of this number was Basilides, though, as his followers boast, he claimed Glaucias, the interpreter of Peter, for his teacher; as it is likewise reported that Valentinus was a hearer of Theudas, who was familiar with Paul. As for Marcion, who was their contemporary, he continued to remain as an old man with his juniors."*

The account of Clement respecting Valentinus and Marcion corresponds with what is said by Irenæus; who states that Valentinus "came to Rome while Hyginus was bishop, flourished during the time of Pius, and remained till that of Anicetus.—Marcion was at his height under Anicetus."† The particular dates assigned to these three bishops of Rome

* Stromat. vii. § 17. pp. 898, 899. The rendering, "continued to remain as an old man with his juniors," is founded on a conjectural emendation. The sentence now stands in Clement thus; *Μαρκίων γὰρ κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αὐτοῖς ἡλικίαν γενόμενος, ὡς πρεσβύτης νεωτέροις συνεγένετο· μεθ' ὃν Σίμων ἐπ' ὀλίγον κηρύσσοντος τοῦ Πέτρου ὑπήκουσεν.* For *συνεγένετο· μεθ' ὃν*, I would read *συνεγένετο μένων.* Marcion, as will be immediately mentioned above, is spoken of by Justin Martyr as still living in his time, about the year 150.

The words relating to Simon, *Σίμων ἐπ' ὀλίγον κηρύσσοντος τοῦ Πέτρου ὑπήκουσεν*, are evidently foreign from the purpose of Clement. He is insisting that the heretical teachers appeared after the apostolic age. But, according to the word in question, Simon is represented, not as a heretic who appeared after the apostolic age, but as contemporary with St. Peter; while, if their connection with what precedes by *μεθ' ὃν* be retained, he is at the same time affirmed to have succeeded Marcion. It seems, therefore, not unlikely that the words were originally a marginal annotation, which has been introduced into the text of Clement, and which was made by some one, who, thinking Simon the author of all the Gnostic heresies, observed that Clement had omitted to mention him. But Simon is nowhere so spoken of by Clement.

That there is some corruption of the text of the sentence I have quoted is evident; and various emendations have been proposed. See the note on it in Potter's, edition of Clement, and Lewald's *Commentatio de Doctrinâ Gnosticâ* p. 12, seqq.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. iii. c. 4. § 3. pp. 178, 179.

are so various and uncertain as to make it not worth while to give them ; but the first died some time before, and the last survived, the middle of the second century. Justin Martyr, who wrote his first Apology about the year 150, twice speaks in it of Marcion as then living ; * and Tertulian refers both Marcion and Valentinus to the times of Antoninus Pius.†

The Valentinians, Marcionites and Basilidians are all mentioned in the remaining works of Justin Martyr. In his Dialogue with Trypho, he says, that the existence of men, who, though Christians in profession, teach not the doctrines of Christ, but those of the spirits of delusion, serves to confirm the faith of the true believer ; because it is a fulfilment of the prophecies of Christ. He had declared that false teachers should come in his name, having the skins of sheep, but being ravening wolves within. “And accordingly,” says Justin, “there are and have been many coming in the name of Jesus, who have taught men to say and do impious and blasphemous things.” “Some in one way, and some in another, teach men to blaspheme the Maker of All, and the Messiah who was prophesied as coming from him ; and the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.” In these words Justin refers to the fundamental doctrines of the Gnostics, that the maker of the material universe, or the chief of those by whom it was made, was not the supreme God, but a being imperfect in power, wisdom, and goodness ; that the same being was the god of the Jews ; and that the expected Jewish Messiah, who had been foretold as coming from him, had been superseded by another, an unexpected messenger of a far higher character and office, coming from and revealing the true God. Some of the heretics mentioned, Justin proceeds to say, “are called Marcionites, some Valentinians, some Basilidians, some Satur-

* I. Apolog. p. 43. p. 85.

† Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 19. p. 374. De Præscript. Hæret. c. 30. p. 212.

nilians, and others by different names, after their leaders.”* The Saturnilians or followers of Saturnilus, or Saturninus, as he is more commonly called, were an obscure sect which requires no particular notice.

The Marcionites are twice mentioned by Justin elsewhere. “Marcion of Pontus,” he says, “under the impulse of evil demons, is even now teaching men to deny the God who is the Maker of all things celestial and terrestrial, and the Messiah his Son, who was foretold by the prophets, and proclaiming a certain other God beside the Maker of all things, and likewise another son.”†

Beside these notices of them in his remaining works, Justin composed, as he himself informs us,‡ a treatise against all heresies; but this is not extant. Irenæus§ quotes a book of Justin against Marcion, which was perhaps a portion of the work just mentioned, but which, whether it were so or not, is also lost.

Such being the case, the most important authority respecting the history of the early heretics, except the Marcionites, is his contemporary Irenæus. The large work of Irenæus which remains to us (principally in an ancient Latin translation) is occupied by the statement and refutation of their opinions. Though he gives accounts of other heresies, he writes with particular reference to the Valentinians, whom he regarded as the chief of the Gnostic sects. || “The doctrine of the Valentinians,” says Irenæus, “is a summary of all heresies, and he who confutes those heretics confutes every other.”¶ He explains at length their theory as it existed in his day, not indeed in its original form, as it proceeded from Valentinus, but as it had been subsequently modified by one

* Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 207-209.

† I. Apolog. p. 85; vide etiam p. 43.

‡ I. Apolog. p. 44.

§ Cont. Hæres. Lib. iv. c. 6. § 2. p. 233.

|| Ibid. Lib. i. Præf. § 2. p. 3.

¶ Ibid. Lib. iv. Præf. §. 2. p. 227. conf. Lib. ii. c. 31. § 1. p. 163.

of his most distinguished followers, Ptolemy.* Afterwards he gives an account of the original scheme of Valentinus,

* The system of the Valentinians explained at length by Irenæus is the system as taught by Ptolemy. In the introduction to his account Irenæus says expressly; "I will according to my ability give an account of the doctrine of their present false teachers, I mean that of the Ptolemæans,—τὴν γνώμην αὐτῶν τῶν νῦν παραδιδασκόντων, λέγω δὴ τῶν περὶ Πτολεμαίων—this being a collection of the choicest flowers of the Valentinian school." Lib. i. Præf. § 2. p. 3. And he concludes his account of it with these words; "Such is the system of Ptolemy;" "Et Ptolemæus quidem ita." Lib. i. c. 8. in fine, p. 43. To this account of the Ptolemæo-Valentinian system he subjoins, as I have mentioned in the text, a short statement of the system as originally taught by Valentinus himself. Tertullian likewise, who followed Irenæus, evidently regarded the system, which is given at length by Irenæus, and which he likewise details, as that of Valentinus modified by Ptolemy. See his work "Adversus Valentinianos," particularly chapters 8, 12, 19, 33.

But Mosheim (in his "Commentarii de Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum") mistakes the system of the Valentinians as modified by Ptolemy for the original doctrine of Valentinus himself, and represents Ptolemy as holding a still different system (p. 389, seq.). He was led into this error by Epiphanius. Irenæus and Tertullian, after explaining the Ptolemæo-Valentinian system, both speak of a modification of it introduced by some disciples of Ptolemy. Comp. Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 12. p. 56, in the old Latin Version, with Tertullian, c. 33. But Epiphanius, (Hæres. xxxiii. § 1. p. 215,) in copying Irenæus, with his usual incorrectness and confusion of mind, represents this modification as introduced by Ptolemy himself, and hence has given occasion to the mistake I have mentioned, which appears in other writers beside Mosheim; as for instance, in Walch. See his "History of the Heretics" (in German), Vol. i. p. 388.

But this is not the only error respecting Ptolemy into which Mosheim has fallen. He says (*ubi sup.*); "Among those who are reported to have been disciples of Valentinus was Ptolemy, a subtile and eloquent man, who departed in several particulars from the common opinions of his sect, especially in naming and arranging the Æons differently from his master, and, as appears, in changing them into powers of God. Secundus, on the other hand, whom Irenæus reckons among the principal disciples of Valentinus, maintained that the Æons were substances or persons." "It is certain," says Mosheim in his note on this passage, "that Ptolemy differed from Secundus concerning the nature of the Æons, the former regarding them as attributes and powers of the divine nature, and the latter as substances or persons; while each contended that his was the true opinion of his master." Hence Mosheim concludes, that Valentinus was a man of some genius, but of weak understanding, who left most of his opinions obscurely defined.

Mosheim says that Ptolemy regarded the Æons as "attributes and powers of the divine nature," not "as substances or persons." This statement is inconsistent not merely with the true system of Ptolemy, but equally with that of his fol-

which does not appear to have differed in any essential particular from the modification of it by Ptolemy.*

The statements of Irenæus respecting the Valentinians are confirmed by Tertullian in a work written expressly against that sect,† which so closely resembles the account of Irenæus, as to leave little doubt that he took this for the basis of his own; though there is no reason for supposing that his acquaintance with the doctrines of the Valentinians was derived only from the writings of that earlier father. Many notices of them are found in his other works, and in those of Clement of Alexandria, and of Origen. These notices confirm what is stated by Irenæus, and add something to the information which he affords.

We have also some remains of the writings of Valentinians themselves. The most important of them is a letter by Ptolemy, preserved by Epiphanius.‡ It is addressed to a lady, whose name was Flora, and contains an account of his opinions concerning the origin and character of the Jewish Law, and the God of the Jews, whom he identifies with the

lowers, which Mosheim ascribes to him; and is directly contrary to the account of Tertullian, who says that "Ptolemy numbered the *Æons* in classes and gave them distinct names, assigning to them the character of personal existences, but external to the deity, while Valentinus had included those existences in the totality of the Divinity, as feelings, affections, and emotions:" "Eam [i. e. Valentini viam] postmodum instravit nominibus et numeris *Æonum* distinctis; in personales substantias, sed extra Deum, determinatas [f. determinans], quas Valentinus in ipsâ summâ divinitatis, ut sensus et adfectus et motus, incluserat." *Advers. Valentin.* c. 4. p. 251.

I have noticed particularly these errors of Mosheim, because from his high reputation, in many respects well deserved, and from the general familiarity with his name, as a writer on ecclesiastical history, he is likely to be one of the first authors consulted by an English student. But his accounts of the Gnostics are not to be relied on. He did not, as I conceive, rightly apprehend their distinguishing characteristics; and, at the same time, the bent of his mind to systematize and form hypotheses led him to overlook and mistake facts, so that he is often incorrect, falling into such errors as have just been remarked.

* Lib. i. c. 11. p. 52, seq.

† *Adversus Valentinianos.*

‡ *Hæres.* xxxiii. p. 216, seqq. The letter of Ptolemy is also printed in the Appendix to Massuet's edition of Irenæus.

Maker of the World. However erroneous may be the opinions of Ptolemy, he expresses himself with good sense, and his manner is unobjectionable.

Epiphanius has likewise given an extract from the work of some one, whom he calls a Valentinian, but whose name he does not mention.* It relates to the derivation of the Æons. The writer commences by professing his intention to speak of "things nameless and super-celestial, which cannot be fully comprehended by principalities, nor powers, nor those in subjection, nor by any one, but are manifest only to the thought of the Unchangeable;" and he proceeds in a manner conformable to this annunciation, so discouraging to a common reader. It is a very offensive specimen of the extravagances of some of the Gnostics. Epiphanius, as has been mentioned, ascribes it to a Valentinian. But, from its want of correspondence with the preceding accounts of the different systems held by Valentinus and his followers, it affords additional proof, either that the speculations of the Valentinians were continually changing their form, or that the names of ancient sects were very loosely applied in the time of Epiphanius.†

There is also a work consisting in great part of extracts from one or more writers of the school of Valentinus.‡ But

* Hæres. xxxi. p. 168, seqq., et apud Irenæi Opp. Ed. Massuet. p. 355.

† In the passage quoted by Epiphanius, there are allusions of the grossest kind in reference to the production of the Æons. Such language, as Clement of Alexandria informs us, was used, in his time, by the followers of an individual named Prodicus; but Clement, in speaking of them, exculpates the Valentinians from the imputation of such impurity: *Εἰ γὰρ καὶ οὗτοι, καθάπερ οἱ ἀπὸ Οὐαλεντίνου, πνευματικὰς ἐτίθεντο κοινωνίας, ἴσως τις αὐτῶν τὴν ὑπόληψιν ἐπεδέξατο· σαρκικῆς δὲ ὀβρεως κοινωνίαν εἰς προφητείαν ἁγίαν ἀνάγειν ἀπεγνωκότος ἐστὶ τὴν σωτηρίαν*. Stromat. iii. § 4. pp. 524, 525.

‡ The title of this compilation is *Ἐκ τῶν Θεοδότου, καὶ [f. Ἐκ τῶν Θεοδότου. Αἱ] τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς καλουμένης Διδασκαλίας κατὰ τοὺς Οὐαλεντίνου χρόνους Ἐπιτομαί*, that is, if the proposed emendation be admitted; "From the Writings of Theodotus. The Heads of the Oriental Doctrine, so called, as it existed in the Age of Valentinus." I shall quote the work under the name of "Doctrina Orientalis." It may be found in Potter's edition of the Works of Clement of Alexandria, p. 966, seqq.

it is of less value than might be expected. It presents no connected system. Its language is very obscure; its text appears to have been but ill preserved, and there is a difficulty in distinguishing between the words and sentiments of the compiler and those which he quotes.

Beside the writings mentioned, Origen has preserved various passages from a commentary on the Gospel of John by Heracleon, a distinguished Valentinian of the second century; and Clement of Alexandria affords us another extract from Heracleon and a few extracts from the works of Valentinus himself.*

Of the opinions of Marcion and his followers, our information is nearly or quite as ample. Irenæus indeed gives but a short account of them, it having been his intention, as he states, to refute that heretic in a separate treatise. This work, if he ever accomplished it, which is not probable, is now lost. The reasons which he assigns for discussing Marcion's system by itself deserve attention. He says, "*Because Marcion alone has dared openly to mutilate the Scriptures, and has gone beyond all others in shamelessly disparaging the character of God [the Creator], I shall oppose him by himself, confuting him from his own writings; and with the help of God effect his overthrow by means of those discourses of our Lord and his Apostle [St. Paul], which are respected by him, and which he himself uses.*"† In speaking of Marcion's disparaging the character of God, Irenæus refers, as will be readily understood, not to Marcion's opinions concerning the Supreme Being, but to his opinions concerning that inferior agent, whom the Gnostics conceived of as the Maker of the World. In the view of Irenæus, the Supreme God and the Maker of the World being the same, what was said unworthily of the latter he regarded as virtually said of the former.

* These fragments of Heracleon and Valentinus are collected in the Appendix to Massuet's edition of Irenæus.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 27. § 4. p. 106.

The information respecting the Marcionites which we miss in Irenæus, is abundantly supplied by Tertullian in his long and elaborate treatise, "Against Marcion;" a composition that so clearly exhibits the workings of a powerful mind, in which striking thoughts are presented with such condensation of language, expressions stand out in such bold relief, and arguments are sometimes so rapidly developed, as, notwithstanding a difficult style and a corrupt text, to fix the attention, and create an interest in the exposition and confutation of obsolete errors. Of Marcion and his followers, we find mention, likewise, in other works of Tertullian, and in those of Clement and of Origen; and, in addition to what is given by Tertullian, Epiphanius affords some further information, which there is no particular reason to distrust, respecting Marcion's mutilations of the New Testament.

As regards other Gnostic sects existing in the second century, our principal information must be derived from the earlier fathers who have been mentioned, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement, and Origen.* For the most part, the later fathers who have written concerning the Gnostics, either copy their predecessors, or present us, instead of facts, with misconceptions, fictions, and calumnies; or perhaps report under some ancient name the doctrines and practices ascribed to supposed individuals of their own day, who, if such individuals really existed, had little in common with those by whom the name given to them had been formerly borne. If we would have any just conceptions of Christian antiquity, we must never lose sight of the distinction between the *earlier* and the *later* fathers, between those who lived before, and those who lived after, the establishment of Christianity as the re-

* I have already had occasion to mention the addition by another writer to Tertullian's work *De Præscriptione*. (See p. 41, note ||.) The date of its composition is uncertain. It is a brief summary of some of the common accounts of the heretical sects, evidently made with little investigation, and, consequently, of little value. An undue weight is sometimes given it, by its being quoted as if written by Tertullian.

ligion of the Empire. It has been greatly neglected. It admits of particular exceptions and much qualification in favor of individuals. But, generally, a wide separation is to be made between the patient or stern sufferers of the ages of persecution, whose religion was the principle of their lives, and the courtier bishops who frequented the imperial palace, the factious and virulent party-leaders who rent the church with their dissensions, and the fiery ascetics to whom monastic superstition gave birth.

Of the later writers concerning the Gnostics, the first to be mentioned is Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, during the latter part of the fourth century, and the author of a large work, "Against Eighty Heresies." He was a zealot of a mean mind and persecuting temper. He had a childish love of multiplying the sects and names of the heretics, and was unsparing in loading them with opprobrium. He was, undoubtedly, credulous, and has sometimes told in good faith what cannot be believed; but the stories that he relates on his own authority show that his want of truth was equal to his want of good sense. In some of those charges which he is ever ready to bring against the heretics, he discovers a mind familiar with the most loathsome conceptions of impurity. His work, at the same time, is full of blunders and contradictory statements, arising from ignorance, negligence, and want of capacity. Still something may be learnt from it, and the testimony of Epiphanius may deserve attention, when his reports are intrinsically probable, when they coincide with, and complete, the information of some more credible writer, when they are in opposition to his own prejudices, or in cases in which there was no temptation to falsehood and small liability to mistake. Sometimes also we may form a probable conjecture, by considering on what facts a particular misrepresentation, coming from a writer of such a character, was likely to be founded. Even where his accounts in their gross state are false, it has been found possible by

combining them with the information received from others, by subjecting them to an analysis and applying the proper tests, to detect and separate a portion of truth.

We pass to a work on heresies, entitled "A Dialogue concerning the right Faith in God," *De rectâ in Deum Fide*.* This has sometimes been regarded as a work of Origen; but it is the production of a later writer, who lived after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, and appears to have borne, like Origen, the name of Adamantius; it being now ascribed in its title to an author of that name. In determining the opinions of the ancient heretics, too much credit has been given to this work, which deserves little or no consideration when its accounts are inconsistent with those of the earlier fathers. It is the production of one who was very imperfectly acquainted with the real doctrines of the Gnostics, if he meant to represent them correctly, and who has, in consequence, improperly assigned to different sects opinions which it was his purpose to confute.†

* It is published in the first volume of De la Rue's edition of Origen.

† There is one error in this work, which is essentially inconsistent with what have been stated as the fundamental doctrines of the Gnostics, and which, from that circumstance, and from its strikingly illustrating the character of the work, may be here pointed out.

In the fourth section of this Dialogue (Origen. Opp. i. 840), one of the speakers, bearing the character of a Valentinian, is represented as reading a long passage, of which Valentinus himself is said to be the author. According to this passage, and the subsequent representations of the author of the Dialogue, Valentinus and his followers regarded the Supreme Being as the immediate architect of the material universe. But the full and clear testimony of all the more ancient writers on the subject, and the undoubted remains of the writings of Valentinians, leave no doubt that this is a gross error.

Fortunately we are able to trace the history of this misrepresentation. The pretended words of Valentinus, with a part of the Dialogue which follows, are transcribed from an older work, a dialogue that has been attributed to Methodius, a Christian writer about the close of the third century. This will appear from a comparison of the Dialogue *de rectâ Fide*, pp. 840-845, with the dialogue ascribed to Methodius, in the edition of his works by Combefis, pp. 352-366. In this older dialogue the pretended words of Valentinus appear as the language of one of the speakers, who bears the name of Valens or Valentinus, it is uncertain which,

In the latter half of the fourth century, a work on heresies was composed by Philaster, Bishop of Brescia in Italy, a

but who is neither represented as the distinguished heretic Valentinus, nor as belonging to his school, nor indeed as a heretic of any sect. In its original state, therefore, the passage can neither be regarded as one proceeding from Valentinus, nor as an exposition of the doctrine of the Valentinians. If the writer of the Dialogue *de rectâ Fide* intended to give a correct representation, it must have been through some strange misconception, and great ignorance of his subject, that he has made use of the passage as he has done.

It may here be observed, that the older dialogue ascribed to Methodius appears to have been in fact the composition of a still earlier writer, Maximus, supposed to have lived in the second century. It is named as his work, and a long quotation is given from it by Eusebius in his "Præparatio Evangelica" (Lib. vii. p. 337, seqq. Ed. Viger. conf. Origenis Philocalia, c. 24. pp. 82-90. Ed. Spencer); and in his Ecclesiastical History he mentions Maximus as the author of what appears to be the same work. (Lib. v. c. 27.)

The great difficulty which presents itself, if any credit be attached to the representation of the Valentinian system given in the Dialogue *de rectâ Fide*, has been little attended to. Mosheim (Comment. de Rebus Christian. p. 27. not.) refers to the Dialogue as a work of Origen, and to the passage in question as a genuine fragment of Valentinus; but takes no notice of either in his long account of the Valentinian system. Beausobre, also, views the passage as genuine, and quotes it to prove that Valentinus regarded matter as coëternal with the Deity; and that the ancient fathers had misrepresented his doctrine concerning its origin. (Hist. du Manichéisme, Tom. ii. pp. 159, 160.) In his earnestness to establish these points, he does not suffer his attention to rest on the fact, that the supposed fragment of Valentinus is irreconcilable with all our best established knowledge respecting the Gnostics. No Gnostic sect regarded the Supreme Being as the immediate architect of the material universe. As regards the coëternity of *primitive* matter with the Deity, it was, in all probability, a doctrine held by Valentinus and by all the other Gnostics, nor do I conceive that the early fathers assert any thing contradictory to the supposition.

Notwithstanding the length of this note, I would here make a few remarks on the work just quoted, the *Histoire de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, by Beausobre. It is one to which I have been much indebted, and with which I must often disagree, where I shall not think it necessary to direct attention to the fact. It is, in many respects, a model of the manner in which ecclesiastical history should be *critically* studied; using the word *critically* in contradistinction to regarding the study under a moral, religious, or philosophical aspect. Though the Manichæans alone are its professed subject, it is one of the most important works in modern times, perhaps the most important, on the subject of the Gnostics also. It is free from bigotry. The author has no prejudices against the heretics, and none in favor of their catholic opponents. His prejudices are of an opposite kind. His learning is various and abundant; his style lively and clear; and in the examination of details he is quicksighted, acute, and ingenious, often detecting error and falsehood.

writer of the lowest order. It is full of almost pitiable weaknesses. His reputation, for some reputation he had, serves to show how low the human intellect had sunk in his age within the limits of the Western Empire.*

But his vivacity and originality sometimes betray him into merely specious hypotheses and expositions, in support of which he brings together far-sought and unsound authorities, and over-subtile arguments. His great deficiency, however, as it seems to me, consists in the want of a distinct and correct conception of the general character either of the Manichæans or of the Gnostics. Thus, he has no sufficient standard to guide him in judging of particulars concerning them. There is also in his work a want of lucid arrangement; the parts which precede serve but little to prepare the way for those that follow. The space assigned to different topics is disproportioned to their relative importance; and there is too much matter that is merely incidental to the main subjects of discussion. Thus we may close the book with a feeling, that it contains a great amount of information, that it suggests and facilitates many inquiries; but, at the same time, with no very well-defined notions of the ancient heretics of whom it treats. Yet it would be ungrateful in one, who has been engaged in the same investigations, not to express his obligations to Beausobre, as by far the most instructive and agreeable of his companions, distinguished for his good sense and acuteness, his fertility of reference and readiness of combination, and for an alacrity of mind and an abundance of resources, which are never exhausted by the difficulties of his subject.

* It may not be uninteresting to notice a few passages of Philaster; but I have no copy of his work at hand, except that published by De la Bigne, in the fifth volume of his "Bibliotheca Patrum" (Paris, 1575), to the columns of which I shall refer.

He says that the Samaritans derived their name from a king, Samarus; or, as others said, from a son of Canaan of that name (col. 7); and that the Pagans and Greeks were so called after two kings, Paganus and Græcus, sons of Deucalion; for which he appeals to the authority of Hesiod (coll. 37, 38). He makes it a heresy to maintain that the number of years since the creation is uncertain (col. 38); but he was himself so ignorant of chronology as to affirm, that, at the time when he wrote, more than four hundred years had elapsed since the birth of Christ (col. 34), though he died before the conclusion of the fourth century. He reckons twenty-eight heresies of the Jews before Christ; and among them, worshippers of frogs; that is, the frogs which were one of the plagues of Egypt (col. 8);—worshippers of mice; the mice which devastated the land of Ashdod (1 Sam. v. 6, vi. 1, according to the Septuagint, and vi. 5), when the ark was taken by the Philistines (col. 8);—and worshippers of wells (*Puteoritæ, qui puteos colunt*), which heresy is founded by him on the passage of Jeremiah (ii. 13), "Me have they forsaken, the fountain of living water, and they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (col. 9). Among these Jewish heretics he likewise reckons the Herodians, who, he says, expect Herod, the king of the Jews, who was smitten by an angel (Acts xii. 23), as the Messiah (col. 12). In this story one may suspect that he confounded the Herod of whom he speaks, with his

His work is, however, quoted as a main source of information on the subject by Augustine, who has left a name indelibly impressed on the history of the world; and who, in the first half of the fifth century, likewise wrote on heretics. But his "Catalogue of Heresies,"* as it is entitled, is merely a synopsis, apparently a hasty production, composed without any critical inquiry. It is of no authority, containing little which is not taken from Epiphanius or Philaster; and it even appears that he was ignorant of the existence of

grandfather Herod the Great; for Epiphanius (Hæres. xx. Opp. i. 45), with no more truth, but with a little less absurdity, than Philaster, pretends that the Herodians believed that Herod the Great was the Messiah.

It is to be observed, that in enumerating his heresies, of which he reckons one hundred and twenty since Christ, he uses the word "heresy" in two senses, in the one to denote an heretical sect, and in the other an heretical opinion. It is a heresy, according to him, to hold that earthquakes are produced by natural causes and not by the wrath of God (col. 32);—to maintain that Christians were posterior to Jews and Pagans, there having been Christians in faith and life, who were believers in the Trinity, from Adam to Moses (col. 36);—to deny that all the Psalms were written by David (col. 46);—and not to interpret allegorically the account of Solomon's wives and concubines (col. 57).

"It is a heresy," he says, "to believe that the stars are fixed in heaven, and do not every evening suddenly come forth from hidden treasure-houses disposed by God, at his command" (col. 48). One might here question whether he had not mistaken the meaning of Philaster, did he not proceed to enlarge upon his conception, so as to leave no doubt concerning it.

Others of his heresies are curious, as giving a view of the opinions and practices of his time; but on these it would be foreign from our purpose to dwell. I will only mention, that one is of those who used water instead of wine in the sacrament (col. 23);—another of those who ascribed the Epistle to the Hebrews to any author but St. Paul (col. 27);—and a third of the followers of a certain Rhetorius (col. 28), who, he says, praised all heresies, and said that they were all true ("qui omnes laudabat hæreses, dicens omnes bene sentire, et neminem errare ex eis"). This, Augustine, who quotes the account in his own "Catalogue of Heresies," says is so absurd, that it appears to him incredible. A like doctrine, however, has found favor in other times than those of Philaster. Even in our own age it has been taught, that in all systems of philosophy or religion, there is a foundation or nucleus of essential truth. Thus for example, Baur, in his work which I have formerly mentioned, says, "All religions agree in the *Idea* of religion. To that they have the relation of the appearance and form to the substance, of the concrete to the abstract, of the derived to the immediate" (p. 21).

* It is contained in the sixth volume of the Basil edition of his works, published in 1569.

the whole work of Epiphanius. His description of the book which he used is applicable only to an epitome of it.* He probably consulted some manuscript which contained in a Latin translation (for he was ignorant of Greek) only the synopses that Epiphanius has prefixed to the different divisions of his work. It is evident that he did not write from any personal knowledge of Gnostics as existing in his time.

In the fifth century likewise, Theodoret, who holds a high rank among the later Greek fathers, composed a treatise on the heretics in five books;† the first three of which relate to those whom he calls ancient heretics, the Gnostics and the Manichæans;—the Ebionites, and those who believed with them that Christ was only a man;—and some others whom he ranks with neither class. Concerning these ancient heretics, he professes to have compiled his information from older writers, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius of Emesa, Adamantius (the author of the Dialogue *de rectâ Fide*), and others of less note, whose works are lost. It is, perhaps, a proof of his good sense, that he does not name Epiphanius as an authority. He speaks of the ancient sects, preceding the time of Arius, as being for the most part extinct; and apprehends that he may be blamed by some for having “brought them again from the darkness of oblivion into the light of memory.”‡ He says, that God, permitting the evil seed to be sown, had turned the greater part of the tares into wheat, so that most places were free from the Gnostic heresies; the remaining disciples of Valentinus and of Marcion, and likewise the Manichæans, being few, easily numbered, and thinly scattered in certain cities.§ In various

* Ibid. col. 10.

† Hæreticarum Fabularum Compendium, in the fourth volume of Sirmond's edition of his works.

‡ Epist. præfat. ad Sporacium, pp. 188, 189.

§ Hæret. Fab. Lib. ii. Præfat. p. 218.

places he expresses himself to the same effect. The ancient heresies, he informs us, had passed out of notice; they had either been "rooted up, or remained like half-withered trees in a few cities and villages." *

* Lib. iii. Præfat. p. 226. Lib. iii. ad finem, p. 132. Lib. iv. Præfat. p. 232.

Certain assertions, however, in the Epistles of Theodoret may appear, at first sight, irreconcilable with those quoted above. In one place (Epist. lxxxi. Opp. iii. l. ii. p. 564), he says he had converted the inhabitants of eight villages, together with those of the neighbouring country, from the heresy of Marcion, and brought them over willingly to the truth; (ἀσμένως [τὰς κώμας] πρὸς τὴν ἀληθεῖαν ἐκτρέψας). In another (Epist. cxiii. pp. 986, 987), that during the twenty-six years he had been bishop, he had "delivered more than a thousand souls from the disease of Marcion;" adding, that all heresy was thoroughly extirpated from the churches under his charge: and in a third (Epist. cxlv. p. 1026), that by his controversial writings against them, he had made orthodox Christians of more than a myriad of Marcionites; which of course may be considered as an extravagant rhetorical amplification. It is an obvious remark, that a sect must have been already falling to pieces, from which converts were made so readily. It is probable, likewise, that Theodoret, who in these Epistles is defending himself against his enemies, and enumerating his services and labors as bishop, not only exaggerated in the estimate of numbers, but applied the name Marcionite very loosely. The remains of the Marcionites, however, from the more simple doctrine and stricter morality and discipline of the sect, were likely to survive those of the other Gnostics.

Another passage of one of Theodoret's Epistles has been referred to (Priestley's History of Early Christianity, Vol. i. p. 148), as proving that the Gnostics were existing in his time. But the passage has been misunderstood. Theodoret says, "Those who, at the present time, have renewed the heresy of Marcion and Valentinus, and Manes, and the other Gnostics, being angry with me for publicly exposing their heresy, have endeavored to deceive the Emperor." (Epist. lxxxi. p. 564) He is here speaking, not of any proper Gnostics, but of his enemies, the Eutychians, at that time the dominant party in the Church. With reference to their opinions respecting the person of Christ, he elsewhere describes them as endeavouring to plant anew the heresy of Valentinus and Bardesanes, which had been rooted out (Epist. cxlv. p. 1026). In his work on Heresies, likewise, he says, that Satan, by means of "the miserable Eutychians, had caused the heresy of Valentinus, withered long ago, to flower again." (Hæret. Fals. Lib. iv. c. 13. Opp. iv. 246.)

These passages illustrate the loose manner in which the names of ancient Gnostic sects were applied in later times, and serve to show, that they were sometimes used as mere terms of reproach toward those who were regarded as coinciding with the Gnostics in some one of their opinions. A similar use of opprobrious appellations has at all times been common.

Beside the writers who have been mentioned, and of whose respective authority it has been my purpose to give some estimate, there are notices of the Gnostics, though not of much value, in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History; and some information concerning them is scattered, here and there, in the writings of other later fathers. But, in general, it is little to be relied on.

In addition, likewise, to the notices of them by Christian writers, we find that they had attracted the attention of the heathen opponents of Christianity. Celsus brought forward, as objections to Christianity, their real or pretended doctrines, in his work which was answered by Origen. In one place, as quoted by Origen,* he says; "Let no one think me ignorant, that some of the Christians agree that their God is the same with the God of the Jews, while others maintain one opposite to him, from whom they say that the Son came."

In the third century, Gnostics, and individuals holding some of the fundamental doctrines of the Gnostics, were made a subject of remark by the later Platonists, Plotinus and Porphyry. After the death of Plotinus, Porphyry reduced into some form, and gave some finish to, the crude mass of his writings, which he had left unpublished, and prefixed to them an account of his life. In this account he says, that there were in the time of Plotinus many Christians, and other sectaries, drawn away from the ancient philosophy, the followers of Adelphius and Acylinus,† two individuals of whom we have no further knowledge. These sectaries used the works of writers, whose names Porphyry gives, but of

* Cont. Cels. Lib. v. n. 61. Opp. i. 624.

† Γεγόνασι δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πολλοὶ μὲν, καὶ ἄλλοι αἰρετικοὶ δὲ, ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀνηγμένοι, οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἀδέλφιον, καὶ Ἀκυλῖνον, οἱ πολλοὺς ἐξηπάτων. Plotini Vit. apud Opp. a Ficino. (The pages of the Life in this edition are not numbered.) I quote the original of the passage, because it has been differently understood. The uncommon name Acylinus has been supposed to be an error of transcription; but we have no good ground for substituting any other.

whom nothing now remains except their names. They likewise, he states, had books entitled Revelations, ascribed to Zoroaster* and others. "Being," he says, "deceived themselves, they deceived many, pretending that Plato had not penetrated to the depth of the essence of *intelligibles*." Plotinus, he informs us, had written a treatise concerning them, which he, in his arrangement of Plotinus's works, had entitled "Against the Gnostics."† But in the manuscripts of this treatise there is found still another title, more precise and appropriate, which describes it as "Against those who affirm that the World and its Maker are Bad." Porphyry says, that he had himself proved at length, that the work ascribed to Zoroaster was spurious, having been lately fabricated by those sectaries.‡ It may be remarked, that Clement of Alexandria says, that the followers of Prodicus, a most immoral sect of pseudo-Gnostics, boasted of possessing the secret writings of Zoroaster.§

Plotinus, in the tract referred to, represents those against whom he is writing, as believing that the sensible universe was badly formed by an imperfect and erring power, sinking downward, as it were, with failing wings.|| He himself taught that it was eternal, without beginning or end. He refers particularly to doctrines concerning its formation, coincident with those ascribed to the Valentinians by Irenæus,¶ which will be hereafter explained. In reference to the doctrine of the Gnostics concerning Æons, or hypostatized attributes and ideas, emanant from God, and belonging to the totality

* Many spurious works were about this time ascribed to Zoroaster. Of these his "Oracles" alone are, in part, extant. They may be found at the end of Stanley's "History of Philosophy." But they are not the work referred to above. They contain nothing peculiarly Gnostic, but are conformed to the doctrines of the later Platonists, and quoted with admiration by Proclus, and other writers of that school.

† Now forming the ninth book of the second Ennead of his Works, p. 199, seqq.

‡ Plotini Vita, ubi sup.

§ Stromat. i. § 15. p. 357.

|| Cont. Gnost. § 4. p. 202, passim.

¶ Ibid. § 4. p. 202. § 10. p. 209.

of his nature, he objects, that, under pretence of investigating more accurately, they so divided the *intelligible* nature into this multitude of beings as to make it like the sensible. The division, he says, should be as small as possible, into not more than three* (the trinity of the later Platonists). He dwells upon their blaming the constitution and government of the world.† He speaks of their hating the body.‡ He says that they used magical arts.§ And he represents their doctrines as strongly tending to produce bad morals.||

In all this, so far as it goes, there is sufficient agreement with the representations of the fathers concerning the Gnostics. But there is no evidence that Plotinus was writing against Christian heretics. Nothing is said by him concerning that essential part of the scheme of the Gnostics which was founded on Christianity. The doctrines attacked by him might have been, and probably were, all held by heathen speculatists; and to such there seems little doubt that he primarily referred. He nowhere uses the name of Gnostic or Christian in this discussion. He nowhere throughout his writings, makes any direct and open attack on Christians, or expressly recognises their existence. Thus leaving the great body of Christians unassailed, it is not likely that he would have entered into a labored controversy with heretics, disavowed by them, though claiming the Christian name, and not recognised as proper heathen philosophers, who consequently could hardly have been thought by him worthy of so much attention. There are doubtless in his tract "Against the Gnostics," positions asserted contrary to Christian truth, or to what was then the common belief of Christians; as, for instance, he in one place expressly defends polytheism;¶ and in another argues against ascribing diseases to the agency of demons;** but this

* Cont. Gnost. § 6. p. 204.

† Ibid. § 17. p. 215, seqq.

‡ Ibid. § 15. p. 213.

** Ibid. § 14. pp. 212, 213.

† Ibid. § 12. p. 211. § 15. p. 213, passim.

§ Ibid. § 14. p. 212.

¶ Ibid. § 9. p. 207.

does not prove that the writer had Christian heretics particularly in view. In supporting his own philosophy, he could not but advance what was opposite to Christianity, and to the opinions of Christians. He speaks of those holding the doctrines against which he particularly wrote, as being, some of them, friends of his own, who had adopted those opinions before they became his friends.* If any Christian heretics had become friends of Plotinus, a circumstance very improbable, we can hardly doubt, that in controverting their peculiar doctrines, bearing throughout a relation to Christianity, he would have distinctly brought into view the fact of their being Christians. Porphyry says, that those against whom his master wrote were followers of Adelphius and Acylinus. Neither of these names, nor any that may plausibly be substituted for the latter of the two, if it be an error, is found anywhere in the writings of the fathers as that of the founder of a Gnostic sect. Nor is the use of any of the books, mentioned by Porphyry as current among the sectaries of whom he speaks, ascribed by the fathers to any of the Gnostics; unless the Revelations of Zoroaster should be supposed an exception to this remark, on the ground of the statement of Clement, that the secret writings of Zoroaster were used by the followers of Prodicus. But the followers of Prodicus were not, I conceive, Christians.

We may then conclude, that it was not against proper Gnostics, that is, against Christian heretics, that Plotinus wrote, but against heathen speculatists, holding some of the leading doctrines of the Gnostics. Porphyry's enmity to the Christians probably led him to introduce the mention of them, when speaking of this tract of Plotinus, which bears of course against the doctrines controverted in it, by whomever held. In a following chapter, I shall endeavour to show, that there were sects not Christian who were confounded with the Christian Gnostics. But I do not suppose such to have been the case in regard to the individuals whom Plotinus had par-

* Cont. Gnost. § 10. p. 209.

ticularly in view. They, I conceive, were acknowledged Heathens, holding certain Gnostic doctrines. By the term "Gnostics," when strictly used, according to its early and its common application, we mean Christian heretics, who, by being Christians, are sufficiently distinguished from all others with whose principles their own were partly coincident. But we may use the name more loosely to denote individuals, not Christians, who agreed with the Gnostics in their fundamental doctrine of the bad formation and ill-government of the universe by an inferior power or powers; and may thus speak of pseudo-Christian and of heathen Gnostics. It was against heathen Gnostics, that the work of Plotinus seems to have been primarily directed.

Thus we have seen from what writers our information concerning the history of the Gnostics is to be derived, and how their respective authority is to be estimated. If the views that have been taken are correct, it is clear that these writers are not to be adduced indiscriminately. We cannot gain a correct knowledge of the Gnostics from a modern account, in which the statements of Epiphanius, Philaster, Augustine, and Theodoret, are blended, as of equal value with those of Irenæus, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen.

From what has been said, we conclude, that there are no distinct traces of the existence of Gnostic sects or systems during the first century. But before the middle of the second century the Gnostics became a well-recognised body, their most distinguished leaders appeared, and their opinions were formed into different systems. From the writers of this century and the next, to Origen inclusive, our principal authentic information concerning them is to be derived. At the same time, it is only with the opinions of the Gnostics of the first three centuries concerning the genuineness of the Gospels that we are concerned. Those of the Gnostics of a later period require no particular investigation, and throw no light

on the subject. In the latter part of the third century, the sect of the Manichæans arose, nearly allied to that of the Gnostics, but presenting a bolder and broader theory of the Universe, which cast into the shade the system of their predecessors. The names of ancient Gnostic sects, however, still remained in the fourth century, sometimes, we may believe, voluntarily assumed, and sometimes imposed as names of obloquy; but it may be doubted, whether the tenets of the sects originally denoted by those names had not, in many cases, undergone great modifications among their reputed successors. By the writers of this century, the Gnostics are, I think, generally treated of in a manner that implies rather their past existence than their actual prevalence. Their history became full of mistakes and falsehoods. From the third to the fifth century, they were probably dwindling away; and in the fifth century, in the time of Theodoret, they seem, with the exception of some remaining Marcionites, nearly to have disappeared. Indeed, according to Gregory Nazianzen, they had ceased to disturb the church before the Arian controversy arose, in the beginning of the fourth century. Speaking of the period immediately preceding, he says;* “There was a time when we had rest from heresies, when the Simonians and Marcionites, the Valentinians, the Basilidians, and the followers of Cerdo, the Cerinthians and Carpocratians, with all their idle and monstrous doctrines, their complete division of the God of All, and opposing of the Good God to the Creator, were swallowed up in their own ABYSS, and given over to SILENCE.” In the last clause there is a play upon words; *Βυθός*, *the Depth*, or *the Abyss*, being the name given by the Valentinians to the Supreme Being, who was represented by them as having dwelt from eternity with the *Æon*, *Silence*.† After the quotation just made, Gregory speaks of the decline of other heresies, extant in the third

* Orat. xxiii. Opp. i. 414. Ed. Morelli.

† The same play upon words expressive of the same fact is in Theodoret; *Hæret. Fab. Lib. iv. Præfat. p. 282.*

century; and then says, "After a short interval, a new tempest rose against the church," the Arian heresy. He does not represent the old heresies as ever reviving. The passage from which I have quoted is undoubtedly rhetorical and inexact; but we can hardly infer less from it, than that the Gnostic heresy was dwindling away during the fourth century. In the Code of Justinian, however, among the edicts against heretics,* the names of ancient Gnostic sects occur; but how far those to whom they were applied resembled the Gnostics of the second and third centuries, may appear, from what has been before said, to be very questionable.

Respecting the number of the Gnostics, at the time when they were most numerous, we have no means of approximating to any precise computation; but many considerations show, that it must have borne but a small proportion to that of the catholic Christians. The doctrines of the theosophic Gnostics were of such a nature, that they were little likely to be embraced except by men of a peculiar turn of mind, somewhat accustomed to the philosophical speculations of the age; especially as the character of that age, and the external circumstances of Christians, did not favor the affectation of mysticism, or the pride of holding novel theories, among the unlearned. Ptolemy, the Valentinian, in the beginning of his letter to Flora, before mentioned, says, that "not many have a right apprehension of the Law given by Moses," meaning, that not many adopted the Gnostic opinions concerning it. The followers of Basilides affirmed, according to Irenæus, that "few could understand their mysteries, one only in a thousand, and two in ten thousand;" and added, "that the Jews had ceased to be, but Christians were not as yet."† In the *Doctrina Orientalis*,‡ Theodotus, or some other Gnostic, referring to a division of men into three classes, made by the Valentinians, says, that "the earthy

* Lib. i. Tit. 5.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 24. § 6. p. 102.

‡ See before, p. 55, note †.

are numerous, the *rational** [which class included common Christians] are not numerous, and the spiritual [the Gnostics] are rare."† These statements correspond to the common representation of the theosophic Gnostics, that their peculiar doctrines were the esoteric doctrines of Christianity, which had been privately handed down to those capable of receiving them.

What has been said applies more particularly to the theosophic Gnostics. As regards the Marcionites, they were distinguished for their abstinence from worldly pleasures. Marriage was not tolerated among them. Those united by it were obliged to separate on becoming members of their community.‡ Their bold doctrines were opposed without disguise to the common belief, and to the plain language of the Gospels, and were little likely to be received except by individuals possessed of more than usual hardihood of mind. In the practice of their self-denying virtues or extravagances, they were not encouraged, as others have been, by popular admiration. On the contrary, they were objects of odium. They had no external support but from among themselves. They were rejected by the catholic Christians as heretics, and by the Heathens they were persecuted as Christians. They were very conscientious, but very erroneous, believers. Such a sect

* Οἱ ψυχικοί.

† *Doctrina Orientalis*, § 56. p. 988.

‡ *Clement. Al. Stromat.* iii. § 3. p. 515, seq. § 4. p. 522. § 5. p. 529. § 6. p. 531, seqq. *Tertullian. Advers. Marcion.* Lib. i. c. 29. pp. 380, 381. Lib. iv. c. 11. p. 422. c. 23. p. 438. c. 34. p. 450 (where, in Le Prieur's edition, (at C,) *later* is a misprint for *latere*, and for "*nunc conjungens*," we should read "*non conjungens*"). Lib. v c. 7. p. 469. c. 15. p. 480. I refer to these numerous passages, because it has been doubted whether Marcion extended his prohibition of marriage to all his followers. I can perceive no proper ground for the supposition, that has been maintained in various forms, that they were divided into two classes, and that this prohibition was binding only on the higher class. From a single passage of Tertullian already referred to (*Advers. Marcion.* p. 469);—"Marcion totum concubitum auferens fidelibus, (viderint enim catechumeni ejus),"—it may indeed be inferred, that the prohibition of the marriage state was not extended to catechumens, that is, to those aspiring to be members of the sect, and receiving instruction. But nothing more than this, I think, appears.

we must suppose to have been small, compared with the catholic Christians; though there is some ground for believing that its number was nearly or quite equal to that of all the other Gnostics.

The fact, that the different sects of Gnostics insensibly melted away at so early a period, and the further fact, that their doctrines had so little influence upon the belief of subsequent Christians, likewise afford proof that they formed only a small part of the whole Christian body. The same inference may be drawn from the manner in which they were treated by the early fathers, who manifest no alarm at their growth, nor fear of their prevalence, but who write concerning them in a tone of undoubting superiority. It may be further observed, that the early fathers, in the passages in which they speak of the multitude of Christians, who had spread through the world, neither except nor include the Gnostics, but appear not to have had them in mind, though they certainly did not consider them as belonging to the Church, or, in other words, to the great body of proper Christians. In the passages, likewise, in which they speak of the unity of faith in the Church, their modes of expression imply that the Gnostics bore but a small proportion to the catholic Christians. "The Church," says Irenæus, "though scattered over the whole world, carefully preserves the faith derived from the apostles and their disciples, as if it were but a single family in one house. . . . It speaks as with one mouth. For, various as are the languages of the world, the essential doctrine is one and the same. No different belief has been held or taught by the churches founded in Germany, nor by those in Spain, nor in Gaul, nor in the East, nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor by those founded in the middle of the world [Judea]. But as the sun, the creature of God, in every part of the world is one and the same, so the preaching of the truth shines everywhere, and enlightens all who are desirous of knowing the truth."* Language such as this could hardly

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 10. § 2. p. 49. conf. § 1. p. 48.

have been used, if there had been a large body of professed Christians who rejected the doctrines of the Church.

Here, then, we conclude what may be called the external history of the Gnostics. In the next chapter we shall speak of their moral characteristics, in connection with their imperfect knowledge of Christianity.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE MORALS OF THE GNOSTICS, AND THEIR IMPERFECT CONCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHEN, in the second century, after an interval of obscurity, following the times of the Apostles, the catholic Christians appear distinctly in view, we find them distinguished, as a body, by their abhorrence of the vices of the heathen world, by a high and stern morality, by the strictness of the discipline which respective churches exercised over their members, by a general tendency to the virtues of the ascetic and the martyr, and by Christian faith, the conviction of the reality of the unseen and the future, controlling the sense of present pleasures and sufferings. In this character the Marcionites appear to have shared; but what was the state of morals among the theosophic Gnostics, is a question less easy to decide.

Clement of Alexandria divides the heretics into two classes. "They either teach men," he says, "to lead a loose life, or, with over-strained severity, they preach continence through impiety and enmity;" *—that is, as Clement meant, enmity towards the Creator. In his view, the latter class included the Marcionites, and some ascetics among the other Gnostics, to all of whom the name of *Encratites*† was given. They taught that it was not right to marry and bring children into this imperfect and unhappy world; and, regarding the body as evil, considered sensual pleasures as sinful. In consequence, Clement ascribes their principles to enmity to the Creator. "Through opposition to the Creator," he says,

* Stromat. iii. § 5. p. 529, seqq. Conf. §§ 3, 4. p. 515, seqq.

† From the Greek *ἐγκρατής*, "practising self-command," "continent."

“Marcion rejected the use of the things of this world.”* A similar account of the self-denial of the Encratites, and of its cause, is given by Irenæus.† To the strict morals of the Marcionites, Tertullian bears indirect but decisive testimony. He is speaking of their doctrine, that while the Creator was *just*, and inflicted punishment, the Supreme God, their God, was *good*, and not to be feared. “Come now,” he says, with his usual force of expression, though the sentiment is incorrect, “you who do not fear God, because he is good, why do you not indulge in every lust, the chief gratification of life, as far as I know, to all who do not fear God? Why not frequent the customary pleasures of the raging circus, the savage arena, and the lascivious theatre? Why, in times of persecution, do you not at once take the proffered censer,‡ and save your life by denying your faith? ‘Far be it from me!’ you say, ‘Far be it from me!’ You fear to offend then, and thus you prove that you fear him who forbids the offence.”§ Conformably to this, Origen speaks of the good morals of some of the heretics, as one means of drawing men over to their doctrines; and he states hypothetically the case of such a heretic, “either a Marcionite,” he says, “or a disciple of Valentinus, or of any other sect.”||

But, generally, the accounts of the morals of the theosophic Gnostics are very unfavorable. According to the statements of Irenæus, the Valentinians, affirming themselves to be distinguished from others by their spiritual nature, which made a part of their original conformation, maintained that it was impossible they should not be saved, whatever they might do. They regarded the spiritual principle identified with them as incapable of pollution; and compared themselves to gold, which receives no injury from defilement. Hence the perfect among them, he affirms, practised without fear all that

* Stromat. iii. § 4. p. 522. † Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 28. § 1. pp. 106, 107.

‡ The censer was proffered, that the person accused of Christianity might offer incense to some idol, and thus refute the charge.

§ Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 27. pp. 379, 380.

|| Homil. in Ezechiel. vii. § 3. Opp. iii. 382.

is forbidden. They ate idol-sacrifices, and celebrated the heathen festivals; some of them did not abstain from the shows of gladiators and the fights with wild beasts, "spectacles," says Irenæus, with the new feeling of a Christian concerning them, "hated by God and men;" and others were grossly licentious in their lives, seducing and corrupting women, by teaching them their principles.*

The erroneous doctrine, mentioned by Irenæus, concerning their spiritual nature, appears, in its essential features, to have been common to the Valentinians generally, and also to the other theosophic Gnostics,† but not the moral offences with which he charges them as its consequence; as may appear in part from the limiting words, "some," and "others," and "the perfect among them" (used perhaps ironically), which he introduces into his account. Of the Valentinians and other theosophic Gnostics, it is to be recollected, on the one hand, that they were Christians, and, on the other, that they were not rational Christians. As a sect, they entertained very erroneous views of our religion; and probably many of them had been very ill informed concerning it. Repelled, as they were, from the great body of believers, there is no reason to doubt, that there were among them those whom the power of Christianity was not sufficient to withdraw from the evil influences of the Pagan world, by which they were surrounded; whose ties to it were far from being altogether broken; who still remained entangled among its corruptions. With some softening, perhaps, of such charges as those of Irenæus, we have no ground for questioning their applicability to a portion of the theosophic Gnostics; but, at the same time, we have evidence, to which we will now advert, that they were true only of a portion.

Clement of Alexandria, discoursing on self-restraint, quotes almost as an authority a passage from Valentinus. It begins

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 6. p. 28, seqq.

† In addition to what has been quoted from Irenæus, see Clement. Al. Stromat. ii. § 3. pp. 433, 434. § 20. p. 489. Stromat. v. § 1. p. 645.

thus: "There is one who is good, who has openly manifested himself through his son, and through him alone can the heart be made pure, every evil spirit being driven out of it." Valentinus compares the heart polluted by the indwelling of evil spirits, to a caravansary injured and defiled by the strangers who lodge in it. "But," he says, "when the only good Father takes charge of it, it is made holy and enlightened, and thus he who has such a heart is *blessed, for he shall see God*.* Tatian, who was distinguished for his asceticism, was, says Clement, of the school of Valentinus.† Heracleon, a distinguished Valentinian, is quoted by Clement, as teaching that the profession of faith required by Christ of his followers is not that made in words only, but that "made by works answering to faith in him." ‡ And Ptolemy, who remodelled the system of his master, taught that the fasting enjoined by our Saviour was not bodily abstinence, but abstinence from all sin.§

Basilides and his followers formed another branch of the theosophic Gnostics, nearly allied to the Valentinians; and Irenæus brings similar charges of immorality against them.|| But Clement begins the third book of his *Stromata* with quoting two passages, one from Basilides, and the other from his son Isidore, and then proceeds to say; "I have adduced these words for the reproof of those Basilidians who live not as they ought, as if through their Perfectness they were free to sin, or as if, though they should now sin, they would be saved by nature through their innate election; for the founders of their doctrines give them no license so to act." ¶

* *Stromat.* ii. § 20. pp. 488, 489. Valentinus, it will be perceived, alludes to the words of Christ; "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."—The whole passage, as Clement remarks, does not seem easily reconcilable with the doctrine, that the spiritual are so by natural constitution, and are, in consequence, assured of salvation.

† *Stromat.* iii. § 13. p. 553.

‡ *Stromat.* iv. § 9. p. 595.

§ *Epist. ad Floram.* Apud Irenæi *Opp.* p. 360.

|| *Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 24. § 5. p. 102. c. 28. § 2. p. 107.*

¶ *Stromat.* iii. § 1. p. 510.

Thus Clement, writing with less prejudice, corrects, and at the same time confirms in part, the accounts of Irenæus.

But against certain sects and individuals, Clement himself brings the gravest charges of immorality, so deep seated as thoroughly to corrupt their principles. "I have fallen in with a sect," he says, "whose leader affirmed that we must fight with pleasure by the use of pleasure; this genuine Gnostic, for he called himself a Gnostic, thus deserting to pleasure under the pretence of warring against it."* He then mentions others, who perverted (one can hardly think seriously) the ascetic maxim, "that the body must be abused;" and employed it to justify themselves in the most licentious indulgences.† In another place, he speaks of an individual named Prodicus, and of his followers: "They affirm," says Clement, "that by nature they are sons of the First God; that, using the privilege of their birth and freedom, they live as they choose, and that they choose to live in pleasure. They think that they are under no control, as *lords of the Sabbath*, and born superior to every other race, royal children; for a king, they say, is circumscribed by no law."‡ They taught that there was no obligation to pray.§ Speaking of sectaries of a like kind, Clement also says, that there were "some who called intercourse with common women, a mystical communion; doing outrage to the name." "They consecrate such licentiousness," he says, "and think that it conducts them to the kingdom of God." || The charge of teaching that gross licentiousness was a necessary means of liberating the soul from its entanglement in matter, and consequently was a religious duty, is, likewise, brought by Irenæus against the Carpocratians, a sect to be hereafter mentioned.

* Stromat. ii. § 20. p. 490.

† Ibid. pp. 490, 491. Conf. Stromat. iii. § 4. pp. 522, 523.

‡ Stromat. iii. § 4. p. 525.

§ Stromat. vii. § 7. p. 854.

|| Stromat. iii. § 4. pp. 523, 524.

Clement also speaks of individuals, called *Antitactæ* (Opponents), whom he describes as maintaining that "the God of all is our Father by nature, and that all which he made is good; but that one of those produced by him sowed tares, and gave birth to evils, in which he involved us, opposing us to the Father; whence, to avenge the Father, we, they say, oppose him, doing contrary to his will. Since, therefore, he said; 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' we commit adultery, to break his command." * The giver of the Law, it seems, was, in their view, the Devil. Ptolemy, the Valentinian, likewise speaks of some who referred the origin of the Jewish Law to the Devil; but he says, that they also ascribed to him the creation of the world; † which does not appear to have been true of the persons mentioned by Clement. These, it would seem, pretended to be in some sort Christians; for Clement, in reasoning against them, implies that they affirmed, that "the Saviour only was to be obeyed;" ‡ the comparison evidently being between him and the giver of the Law.

There is a passage of the later Platonist, Porphyry, descriptive of individuals, resembling some of those spoken of by Clement, in their pretensions and in their licentious principles. It is in his work in which he defends the Pythagorean doctrine of abstinence from animal food. "The opinion," he says, "that one yielding to the affections of the senses can employ his powers about the objects of intellect, has been the ruin of many of the barbarians," by which term he means those whose religion or philosophy was not Grecian. "They have arrogantly," he continues, "indulged in every form of pleasure; saying, that he who is conversant with other things, may grant such license to the irrational part of his nature." They compared themselves to the ocean, which is undefiled by the pollutions that rivers are continually carrying into it. All things, they said, must be subjected to us. A small body

* Stromat. iii. § 4. pp. 526, 527.

† Epist. ad Floram, pp. 357, 358.

‡ Stromat. iii. § 4. p. 527.

of water is easily made turbid by any impurity ; and so it is in regard to food (the particular subject of discussion) with men of little minds. But where there is a depth of power, men receive all things and are defiled by nothing. "Thus deceiving themselves," says Porphyry, "they act conformably to their error ; and, instead of enjoying liberty, throw themselves into a gulf of misery in which they perish." *

The individuals spoken of by Porphyry were, it appears, ready to admit that men of little minds were corrupted by sensual indulgences. So the theosophic Gnostics, according to Irenæus, affirmed that, while they were altogether secure of salvation, as being naturally spiritual, common Christians, who were not so, must attain salvation through good works and a simple faith,—simple faith, in contradistinction to that perfect knowledge of spiritual things which they themselves possessed.†

There can be no doubt, I think, that the doctrine, held by the theosophic Gnostics, concerning the spiritual and incorruptible nature of a favored portion of mankind, was abused by certain individuals, and connected with the grossest immorality, as is represented by Clement and Porphyry. But I do not conceive, that the individuals of whom they speak were Christian heretics. The supposition of any serious or intelligent belief of the divine mission of Christ is wholly inconsistent with the extreme licentiousness of their principles and practice. So far as they were at all connected with Christianity, we may suppose that they had learnt something

* De Abstinentiâ ab Animalibus necandis, Lib. i. § 42.—It may be observed, that this work is addressed to an acquaintance, who had fallen away from the Pythagorean doctrine, and that, in appealing to him, Porphyry has the following allusion to Christians : "I would not intimate, that your nature is inferior to that of some ignorant persons, who, embracing rules of conduct contrary to those of their former life, submit to be cut limb from limb (*τομὰς τε μερῶν ὑπομένουσι*); and abhor, more than human flesh, certain kinds of animal food in which before they indulged." Lib. i. § 2. He refers, I suppose, to the abstinence of Christians from the flesh of idol-sacrifices, and the other kinds of food prohibited by the council at Jerusalem : Acts xv. 28, 29.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 6. § 2. p. 29. § 4. p. 31.

concerning it, perhaps through the medium of the Gnostics ; and that such was the character of their minds, that they were very ready to break through their old restraints, to treat with contempt the Pagan mythology, to regard themselves as specially illuminated, and to form their crude conceptions into principles that might sanction their licentiousness, as the privilege of their new liberty and their spiritual nature. Sects and individuals of this class may be denominated *pseudo-Christian*, a name to be understood as distinguishing them, on the one hand, from the Christian heretics, and, on the other, from those heathen Gnostics, on whom the influence of Christianity, if any, was more remote. Each of the three classes, however, probably passed into that nearest to it by insensible gradations. Of the pseudo-Christian sects, I shall speak in the next chapter ; and will only here observe, that, taking the name *heathen*, not in the distinguishing sense just mentioned, but in the extent of its meaning, these pseudo-Christians may properly be called Heathens.

As regards the theosophic Gnostics, we have seen that a portion of them were ascetics as well as the Marcionites ; and that immorality was far from being taught or countenanced by the more distinguished of their number. But many of them, a portion so large as, in the minds of some writers, to give, whether fairly or not, a character to the whole, were but partially separated from the heathen world. They joined in its idol-sacrifices, and shared in its licentiousness. The charges brought against them by Irenæus are confirmed, as we have seen, by Clement, as regards one of the two classes into which he divides the heretics. They correspond to the representations of Tertullian. And, at a still earlier period, Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho, introduces Trypho as saying, that "he had learnt that many of those who said that they professed Jesus, and who were called Christians, ate idol-sacrifices," that is, joined in the rites of Pagan worship, "saying that they were nothing

hurt by it." * They justified themselves in their practices by doctrines common to the theosophic Gnostics, which admitted of an easy perversion to the purpose. It is probable, however, that some of them laid little or no stress on the incorruptibility of their spiritual nature; but merely said, as Irenæus states in one passage, that "God did not care much for those things." †

But any approach to idolatry is so contrary to the fundamental doctrine of our religion, and the grosser sensual vices stand in such manifest opposition to the spirituality required by it, and to its express prohibitions, that they would seem to be among the last offences, that one believing himself a Christian might imagine to be countenanced or permitted by Christianity. The case of those Gnostics we have been considering presents, therefore, a remarkable phenomenon. But it is one which may be explained, and its existence, consequently, be confirmed, by considerations drawn from the antecedent history of Christianity, and the state of the ancient world. To these we will now attend.

From the New Testament we learn how imperfectly some of the first Gentile converts comprehended the undivided worship to be paid to the Supreme Being, and the purity of life which Christianity requires. They, like the looser Gnostics of later times, were guilty of licentiousness and of joining in idolatrous rites. "Some," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "being accustomed to the idol, eat even till now as of an idol-sacrifice;" ‡ and he thus exhorts them, referring to the ancient Israelites; "Be not ye idolaters as were some of them, as is written, *The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to sport.* Nor let us commit fornication, as did some of them, of whom three and twenty thousand fell in one day." §

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 207.

† — "non valde hæc curare dicentes Deum." Lib. i. c. 28. § 2. p. 107.

‡ 1 Cor. viii. 7. I read *συνθηλα*, not *συνειδήσει*, as in the Received Text. But which is the true reading is doubtful, and to the present purpose unimportant.

§ 1 Cor. x. 7, 8.

The latter exhortation seems to have been thus intimately connected with the former, because debauchery was so common a part, or an accompaniment, of the religious festivals and rites of the Heathens. As regards idol-sacrifices, it appears that some of the Corinthians thought, that, as "an idol was nothing in the world," they might, therefore, "sit at meat in an idol's temple;" that is, that they might join their former heathen associates in being present at a sacrifice there offered, and at the entertainment following it, when those portions of the victim which belonged to the offerer were eaten;—that they might, as St. Paul expresses it, "have communion with demons," and "partake both of the Lord's table and the table of demons." *

The early history of Christianity affords another remarkable indication of such errors as have been mentioned, existing among its converts. When it was determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to admit the Gentile converts as Christians to their communion, without their being previously circumcised, that is, without their first professing themselves proselytes to Judaism, they were specially enjoined to abstain from idol-sacrifices and from fornication. "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to impose upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; To abstain from idol-sacrifices, and from the eating of blood and of things strangled, and from fornication." † Nothing at first view may strike a modern reader more strangely, than that the eating of idol-sacrifices and unchastity should be coupled in the same prohibition with actions morally indifferent in their nature. But I have referred to this decree (as it has been called), because it affords much light on the state of the early Christian community, in reference to the present subject. We will attend to both parts of it, as their connection requires, though only that relating to idolatry and licentiousness is to our immediate purpose.

* See 1 Cor. viii. 4, 10. x. 20, 21.

† Acts xv. 28, 29.

To explain it, then, two considerations are to be attended to, the prejudices of the Jewish, and the erroneous sentiments and habits of the Gentile, converts. The result of the deliberations of the council was "after much discussion,"* in which those who opposed the admission of the Gentile converts into the church, unless they first became proselytes to Judaism and assumed the observance of the whole Jewish Law, had, we may presume, particularly urged against them the commission of the acts specially prohibited. Why the eating of blood and of things strangled should have given strong offence to those who were zealous for the Law, may appear from the fact, that the command to abstain from them is expressly extended in the Law to strangers sojourning among the Israelites.† It is also represented in Genesis as a universal precept, given by God to Noah and his descendants;‡ and may, therefore, have been regarded, even by many of those Jews who were most liberally disposed, as binding upon all men. It is next to be remarked, that many of the Gentile converts, as it appears, had no correct moral feeling of the offence either of joining a feast in honor of an idol, or of unchastity. At such feasts they had been accustomed to be present, and seeing that they knew, as the Corinthians boasted, "that an idol was nothing in the world,"§ they saw no harm to themselves or others in continuing to enjoy the gratification. As for simple unchastity, it had not been considered by the generality of Heathens as a matter of reproach, except in the female sex. Amid the prevalence of more odious vices, and the general disrespect for woman, it was lightly thought of by the wisest and best among them, and

* Acts xv. 7.

† Leviticus xvii. 10-13.

‡ Genesis ix. 4.

§ St. Paul (1 Cor. viii. 1, seqq.) refers to such a boast ironically, with reference to the misapplication which the Corinthians had made of their knowledge; "Concerning idol-sacrifices we know;—for we all have knowledge; knowledge puffs up, but love edifies; he who thinks he knows something, knows nothing yet as it ought to be known; but he who loves God has been taught by him;—concerning the eating of idol-sacrifices, then, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one."

was either permitted by their moralists and philosophers, or scarcely came within their view as any thing to be reprehended. Thus, while, on the one hand, the strong conscientious prejudices of probably far the greater part of the Jewish believers required the prohibition of eating "flesh with the life thereof, which is its blood";* so, on the other hand, the imperfect notions of religion and morality, which the Gentile converts brought with them, made it necessary to insist particularly on the graver offences specified, and explicitly to announce that they were forbidden by Christianity. But the same influences, that corrupted the imperfect faith of some of the earliest Gentile converts, continued to operate in the second century on the imperfect faith of many of the theosophic Gnostics; nor is there, as some have suggested, any reason to regard those charges as unjust or improbable, when made against a considerable portion of their number, which we know to be true as respects a portion of the professed converts of the Apostolic age.

But the influence of Heathen principles and practice was not the only source of moral error. Even Christian truths, viewed in relation to the circumstances of the times, were liable to be grossly misrepresented and abused; and, sometimes, the strong words in which they are expressed by St. Paul were so perverted as to make them contradict the whole tenor of his doctrine. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,"† said the Apostle in one of the noblest declarations ever uttered. "The creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."‡ "Stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made you free."§ The liberty of which St. Paul speaks was that enlargement of mind produced by Christianity, through new conceptions of duty and of God; liberty from the narrow and bitter prejudices of the Jews, and from the

* Genesis ix. 4.

† Romans viii. 21.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 17.

§ Galatians.

burdensome ritual of their law, which, according to a remarkable expression of St. Peter, was "a yoke that neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear;"* and liberty, on the other hand, from heathen superstition, its sanctified follies, its idle terrors, its abominable rites, and its slavery to gods, whose characters were only a source of moral pollution; that system from which Lucretius thought atheism a happy deliverance;

"Humana ante oculos fœde quom vita jaceret
In terris oppressa gravi sub religione."

The liberty of which the Apostle spoke was freedom from all those hard and degrading observances and supposititious duties "that servitude to the weak and beggarly principles of the world,"† through which men have sought the favor of the being or beings whom they have worshipped, in the neglect of moral goodness. It was freedom from "that spirit of bondage and fear" with which the Jews regarded God, and the reception of the Christian spirit, which "bears witness to our spirits that we are children of God."‡ In a word, it was freedom from superstition and sin. This state of mind, this liberty, was to be attained through faith, by becoming a Christian, that is, through the hearty and practical reception of Christian truth. The favor of God was not, as the unbelieving Jews maintained, to be secured by "the works of the Law;" that is, by the observance of the Jewish Law, according to their notions of what constituted its observance, namely, a strict regard to all its *peculiar* requirements and religious rites. Such observance was so far from being the duty of a Christian, as some of the Jewish believers maintained, that the new convert would wholly mistake the character of his religion, if he suffered himself to be persuaded, that it was an essential means of obtaining God's favor.§ It would be

* Acts xv. 10.

† Τὰ ἀσθενή καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου. Galat. iv. 3, 9.

‡ Romans viii. 14, 15.

§ See the Epistle to the Galatians.

seeking "for completion in the flesh, after having begun in the spirit."* "I tell you," says the Apostle, "ye who seek for righteousness by the Law have done with Christ; ye have fallen away from the dispensation of favor."† To have faith, to be a Christian, was all that was required; and "the works of the Law," in the sense in which that term was used by the unbelieving Jews and bigoted Jewish converts, were not required. But further than this, the blessings which believers enjoyed were not conferred in consequence of any previous merit of theirs, of *any* works which they had performed, nor of any claim upon God, such as the Jews believed themselves to have established by keeping their Law. They were his free gift to a world lying in sin. They were offered equally to the tax-gatherer and to the harlot, as to him who was, or fancied himself, righteous. It was not the goodness of men which had entitled them to this new dispensation of favor; it was their sinfulness and misery which had called for this interposition of mercy; "and now to him," says the Apostle, "performing no works" (that is, to him who had performed no works), "but having faith in God, who receives the sinner to his favor, his faith is accounted righteousness."‡ His sins were forgiven upon his becoming a Christian; for the first duty of a Christian was reformation; and reformation is the only ground of the forgiveness of sin.

Such were the truths maintained by St. Paul. But the bold, brief, unlimited, unguarded language, in which they were occasionally expressed by him, admitted of being misinterpreted in a manner contradictory to the whole spirit of his teaching, and to the fundamental requirements of Christianity. We perceive that he sometimes apprehended that his doctrine might be so perverted. "Brethren," he says to the Galatians, "ye have been called to liberty, only use not your liberty as a pretence for the flesh;" that is, as a pretence for the indulgence of sinful appetites and passions.§ St. Peter, likewise,

* Galatians iii. 8.

† Ibid. v. 4.

‡ Romans iv. 5.

§ Galatians v. 13. Comp. vv. 19-21, where the Apostle enumerates the works of the flesh.

exhorts that Christians should conduct themselves as "free, and not using their freedom as a cloak for wickedness, but as servants of God."* After strongly stating that the pardon of sin was tendered to all by Christianity, St. Paul asks, with reference probably both to the misrepresentations of the unbelieving Jews, and the loose notions of some Christian converts; "What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin that the favor may superabound?"† and earnestly rejects this false inference. How St. Paul's doctrine concerning "works" was abused, we learn from the Epistle ascribed to St. James.‡ It is evident that there were those, who thought that to become a Christian, in a loose sense of the word, was all that was required, who had false notions of Christian liberty and of the pardon of sin, and who comprehended the moral duties among the works from which their faith absolved them.

Great changes in the religious opinions and sentiments of men can hardly be effected without producing also extravagances of speculation, moral irregularities, and skepticism. The belief of the larger part of men has rested, and must ever rest, on authority. They are but sharers in the common belief of the community to which they belong; though this belief, and especially its practical effects, may be greatly modified in different individuals by personal qualities, good or bad. The knowledge of the wisest man is but the result of the action of his mind on the accumulated wisdom and judgments of those who have preceded him, and on what he believes, from testimony, to have been the experience of the past. There are no independent thinkers in the absolute sense of the words. Independent and judicious thinkers, in the more popular sense, are rare. In our intellectual, as well as our moral nature, we are parts of each other, and cannot without a severe struggle release ourselves from the traditional opinions of those with whom we are connected. One

* 1 Peter ii. 16.

† Romans vi. 1.

‡ James ii. 14, seqq.

generation inculcates its faith on another, and this is received, and incorporated into the mind, at a period too early for examination or doubt, and is thus perpetuated from age to age. When, therefore, the authority of the past gives way, the minds of many are liable to be greatly unsettled. To some, the rejection of errors that have been long maintained seems equivalent to the denial of the best established truths ; for the grounds of their belief in the one and the other are the same ; both having been admitted by them on authority.* They either obstinately defend all they have been taught, or, through a tendency to skepticism, impatience of doubt, and an inability to estimate moral evidence, and consequently to discriminate what may be *proved* true, and what false, reject the whole together. Others, again, join at once in the new movement ; and, feeling themselves released from the ordinary restraints of speculation, confident, like the Corinthians, that they have knowledge, and elated by their victory over what wiser men have revered, promulgate, often in a new dialect,

* However obvious is the general truth of the remarks above made, it may be thought by some that they are not applicable to the revolution of opinion produced by Christianity ; but that, on the contrary, the folly of the Pagan religions was such, that they could have had no strong hold on the *belief* of men through the influence of authority. But setting aside all other evidence, the proper fanaticism displayed by the Pagans in their contest with Christianity would alone be sufficient to disprove the error.

Some time after writing what is in the text, I was struck by accidentally meeting with the following passage of Lactantius, which I had read long before, but had forgotten. It speaks of the state of things, when Christianity had been preached for two centuries and a half. After remarking on the Pagan religions, Lactantius says ; “ Hæ sunt religiones, quas, sibi a majoribus suis traditas, pertinacissime tueri ac defendere perseverant ; nec considerant quales sunt ; sed ex hoc probatas atque veras esse confidunt, quod eas veteres tradiderunt ; tantaque est auctoritas vetustatis, ut inquirere in eam scelus dicatur. Itaque creditur ei passim, tanquam cognitæ veritati.” (Institut. Lib. ii. § 6.)—“These are the religions, which, handed down to them from their ancestors, they persevere in most obstinately maintaining and defending. Nor do they consider of what character they are ; but are confident that they are good and true, because they have been transmitted from the ancients. So great is the authority of antiquity, that to inquire into it is pronounced impiety. It is trusted to everywhere with the same confidence as is felt in ascertained truth.”

their crude and inconsequent doctrines, perhaps as the anticipated wisdom of a coming age.

In the breaking up of old opinions, the true and only appeal is to reason. But the process is difficult, and there are few who are capable of carrying it through. When we personify abstract reason we must acknowledge that her decisions are final. But in a large portion of individual minds, the actual power of reasoning is small ; or, rather, if we take into view the whole human race, as spread over the earth, we shall perceive that there is a very large majority, in whom the power of determining by themselves any controversy concerning the higher objects of thought cannot be said to exist. In revolutions of religious opinion, therefore, it has been common to substitute for reason an imaginary faculty,—an intuitive perception of the highest truths. Men claim to know that their opinions are true on the ground that they directly perceive them to be true without the intervention of reasoning. This claim to inward illumination, to an immediate revelation to individual men, has commonly, as in the case of the Gnostics, been asserted by particular sects as their peculiar privilege ; but in our times the privilege has been extended, with magnificent absurdity, to the whole human race.

One other fact may be remarked. In all reforms it is common for men to discern the truth imperfectly under one aspect alone ; to mistake general for unlimited propositions ; and to affirm what is true in a certain sense, and with certain modifications, as universally true. They seize on some doctrine partially correct, because opposite to an old error, and without defining it in their own minds, or reconciling it with admitted truths, or viewing it in its extent and relations, insist on its absolute, unqualified reception.

But in the interregnum and partial anarchy that take place between the overthrow of one system and the establishment of another, moral disorders commonly break out. The passions throw off their restraints, as well as the understanding.

Men's notions of duty change with their religious belief; and they regard as indifferent, actions which they before thought obligatory or criminal; or they even ascribe to the same actions an opposite moral character. The limits of right and wrong are for a time obscured; and there are those who will take advantage of this uncertainty to transgress. The reception of the new system constitutes a distinction, which, in the minds of some, supersedes the necessity and merit of common virtues. There is a wild growth of error, and all religious errors, being mistakes concerning the nature, relations, and duties of man, tend to moral evil. Thus all great and apparently sudden revolutions of religious opinion, which are commonly, in some sense, reforms, as being a reaction against abuses and errors, are accompanied in their turn by new errors and excesses.

It was, I conceive, in contemplation of the demoralizing effects commonly attending sudden changes of religious opinion, however beneficial in their final or immediate result, that our Saviour, at the commencement of his ministry, thus addressed his hearers; "Think not that I have come to annul the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to annul but to perfect. For I tell you in truth, not till heaven and earth pass away, shall the smallest letter or stroke pass away from the Law; no, not till all things are ended." * His meaning was; Think not that I have come to set aside those religious and moral principles, the true Law of God, which your faith inculcates. I have come to explain them more fully, and to enforce them more solemnly. They remain for ever unchangeable. And thus he goes on to say; "Whoever shall break one of these least commandments [that is, one of the least of those which he was about to give] shall be least in the kingdom of heaven." "For unless your goodness exceed that of the teachers of the Law, and the Pharisees, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." †

* Matthew v. 17, 18.

† Ibid. verses 19, 20.

It was among the Gentile converts that the Gnostics appeared; and we shall perceive, that even under the teaching of St. Paul, and those associated with him, the apprehensions of many of the Gentile converts concerning our religion must have been imperfect and erroneous, when we consider what opportunities they enjoyed for attaining a knowledge of it, for correcting their former prejudices, and for determining its bearing upon the mass of their old conceptions and opinions. They had not the help of the New Testament. With the exception of his own epistles, the oral teaching of St. Paul and his associates was probably the main source of instruction to a majority of his converts. But the Apostle, earnest to spread as widely as possible a knowledge of Christ, and driven hither and thither by persecution, often rested but a short time in the places which he visited. Many, we may believe, after witnessing his miraculous power, and hearing from him the fundamental facts and doctrines of Christianity, professed themselves converts, though they had had only a brief opportunity of listening to his expositions of truth and duty. Some doubtless embraced the religion under a temporary excitement of feeling, without a just notion of its character, or a correct sense of the obligations it imposed. We cannot question, that, by the Apostle as well as by our Saviour, the good seed was often scattered where it was choked by weeds. He would encourage every motion toward good. He would not repel any one who professed a desire to turn from sin to righteousness, however crude and unformed were his conceptions of the new religion. He would receive as a disciple whoever regarded it with favor. He would act in the spirit of the words of his master; "Forbid him not; for he that is not against you is for you."

Such being the state of things, great errors, schisms, and opposing parties, and moral irregularities, existed, in consequence, among the earliest Gentile converts. They are often referred to in the Epistles of St. Paul. Into what gross misconceptions of Christianity individuals, who professed them-

selves converts to it, might fall, may appear from the fact, that some among the Corinthians denied its fundamental doctrine of a future life. "How say some among you," asks the Apostle, "that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* The tendency to these evils was aggravated by a spirit of opposition to St. Paul. This originated among the bigoted Jews, zealous for the observance of the Levitical Law by the Gentile converts; and, there can be little doubt, spread from them to others. In his second Epistle to the Corinthians, there is much referring to opponents, who spoke of him disrespectfully and reproachfully. Thus, under the operation of the various circumstances that we have adverted to, individuals were led to form systems for themselves, different from the religion taught by the Apostles: and a way was opened for speculations as extravagant as those of the Gnostics, for moral principles as loose as were those of some of their number, and for the existence of sects which, deriving their origin from the preaching of Christianity, had yet no title to the Christian name.

But we must also recollect, that a knowledge of Christianity was spread by others than the Apostles, and their immediate associates, and those whose teaching they sanctioned. Of such as were or thought themselves converts, many would be zealous to communicate the new doctrine to others. From them it would often pass, more or less mutilated by their ignorance, or adulterated by their prejudices, or blended with their former errors. Of such teachers from among the Jewish converts, who insisted on the observance of the Levitical Law, we have abundant evidence in St. Paul's Epistles. Beside them, we cannot doubt that there were, from the body of Gentile Christians, others with very different conceptions. It is easy to conceive, what crude and false notions of our religion may thus have been spread among its remoter and less informed professors, and how far it may

* 1 Cor. xv. 12.

have been divested of that solemn authority with which it impressed the mind of an intelligent believer.

Great errors might be consistent with honest zeal in those who thus communicated their imperfect conceptions of Christianity. But there also appeared among Christians, pretended teachers of our religion, to whom honest zeal cannot be ascribed. They are spoken of by St. Paul, in addressing the Corinthians, as "false apostles, fraudulent workmen, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ," but in truth "ministers of Satan." * They are described by him as "the many who adulterate, for the sake of gain, the doctrine of God." † The heathen sophists taught for money; and, undoubtedly, often sought to distinguish themselves, for the sake of procuring hearers, by novel, paradoxical, and licentious opinions. When Christianity opened a wholly new field for speculation, producing a strong excitement and action of mind, wherever preached, men of a similar character would be ready to take advantage of this state of things. Thus we find that among the Corinthians there soon appeared false teachers, whose object was to procure a maintenance, and who defrauded and oppressed their disciples. It is in reference to them, or to some one of their number, that St. Paul says; "Ye bear it patiently, if a man make slaves of you, if he devour you, if he take your property, if he treat you insolently, if he strike you on the face. I speak it with shame; for it is as if we ourselves suffered." ‡ Some, probably most or all, of these men, it appears, were Jews; for, speaking of his opponents, he says; "Are they Hebrews? So am I;" § and these Jews might have learned from their own Rabbis to receive fees from their disciples. With the conduct of such false teachers, St. Paul contrasts his own in taking nothing from the Corinthians; partly because he would "afford no pretence to those who wished for a pretence." || And what

* 2 Cor. xi. 13, 15.

§ Ibid. xi. 22.

† Ibid. ii. 17.

|| Ibid. xi. 12.

‡ Ibid. xi. 20, 21.

is remarkable, the very circumstance of his preaching gratuitously was made use of by his opponents to depreciate his character; and he found himself called upon to defend his conduct in this respect. "Have I," he says indignantly, "humbling myself that you might be exalted, done wrong in preaching to you the gospel of God gratuitously?" * The Corinthians were so familiar with the custom of paying the highest fees to those professed teachers of wisdom who were in the most repute, that some of them were disposed to regard as of little value a teacher who did not demand money for his instructions.

He alludes to the subject again, late in life, in his Epistle to Titus; "For there are many," he says, "especially among those of the circumcision, who are disorderly, vain talkers, deluding men's minds, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole families, teaching what should not be taught, for the sake of shameful gain." † And he also refers to them in his first Epistle to Timothy, written about the same time as was that to Titus. "If any one," he says, "teach another doctrine, and hold not to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine of piety, he is puffed up, understanding nothing, but having a diseased craving for discussions and strifes of words, from which proceed ill will, quarrelling, reviling, malicious surmises, perverse disputations of men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, thinking to make a gain of piety. From such keep away. Piety, indeed, with contentment, is a great gain. We have brought nothing into the world; it is clear that we can carry nothing out of it; having then food and clothing, with these we shall be satisfied. But they, whose purpose it is to be rich, ‡ fall into temptation, and a snare, and many senseless and pernicious lusts, which plunge men into destruction and ruin. The root of all these evils § is the love of money, through their craving

* 2 Cor. xi. 7.

† Ch. i. 10, 11.

‡ Referring, I conceive, to those before spoken of as "men of corrupt minds."

§ Not "the root of all evil," as in the common version. The original is, *ῥίζα γὰρ πάντων τῶν κακῶν*.

after which some have strayed from the truth, and have pierced themselves through with many pangs." *

This class of false teachers existed among the Gnostics; and, probably, most of their professors of wisdom, like the heathen sophists, gave instruction only to those disciples who were able to purchase it. Speaking of some of their doctrines, Irenæus says ironically; "It seems to me reasonable, that they should not be willing to teach them openly to all, but only to those who are able to pay a great price for such mysteries; for these doctrines are not like those concerning which our Lord said; 'Freely ye have received, freely give;' but are remote from common apprehension, marvellous and profound mysteries, to be attained with much toil by the lovers of falsehood. Who, indeed, would not spend his whole substance to learn them?" † Such teachers existing, it can be no matter of surprise, that some of them taught systems as unlike Christianity as those of any of the Gnostic sects, and that others merely borrowed certain conceptions from our religion without pretending to embrace it. Had it, indeed, been other than a revelation from God, expressing its divine origin in its whole history and character, had it been only a new form of barbaric philosophy, that had sprung up among the Jews in Galilee, then, instead of bearing down through the heathen world, a broad and ever widening stream, it would have been choked by corruptions and errors, through which it could not force its way; it would have been wasted and lost, like those rivers of Africa and the East, that disappear in deserts of sand. One incommunicable attribute alone, its divine authority, gave it permanence. Whatever might be the mistakes of its disciples concerning it, yet in its own nature it allowed of no amalgamation with human opinions, as sharing its paramount claims. It admitted of no change or addition. This opposed an insuperable barrier to all innovations, which did not at least claim, however

* Ch. vi. 3-10.

† Lib. i. c. 4. § 3. p. 20. Conf. Lib. iv. c. 26. § 2. p. 262.

falsely, to be original doctrines of Christianity. It controlled the operation of those causes of error, which have been pointed out. It is the redeeming principle, which we may hope will yet restore the religion of Christians to the native purity of Christianity. Had it not possessed this character, had it been merely a new system of Jewish philosophy, having a fabulous origin, a system of assertions without proof, for such Christianity is, if it be not a divine revelation, a multitude of sects would have appeared among its Gentile followers, not hovering, like the Gnostics, on the outskirts of our faith, but seizing on the whole ground, forming theories of equal authority with the original doctrine, the records of which they could but imperfectly understand; and at the present day, instead of seeing Christianity the professed religion of the civilized world, we should know as little of disciples of Jesus, existing as a distinct body, as we know of disciples of Socrates.

It has appeared, that, with the first propagation of our religion among the Gentiles, causes of error were operating to produce resistance to the authority of St. Paul and the other Apostles, schisms, moral irregularities, false doctrines, and apostasy. It was with a foresight of this state of things, that Jesus said; "He who perseveres to the end will be saved;" and, at the same time, predicted that many would fall away; and "they will deliver up one another, and hate one another; and many false teachers will arise, and deceive many; and iniquity will so abound, that the love of many will grow cold."* Notwithstanding the vast power which our religion displayed in changing the characters of men, such disorders and evils were to attend its progress. "But know this," says St. Paul to Timothy, in his last Epistle, when anticipating his own martyrdom, "that hereafter there will be evil times; for those men [a class of men of whom he had before spoken] will be selfish, avaricious, boastful,

* Matthew xxiv. 10-12.

haughty, given to evil speaking, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without natural affection, without faith, slanderers, of unrestrained passions, without humanity, without love for what is good, treacherous, violent, puffed up with pride, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a show of piety, but renouncing its power. From such turn away. Of their number are those who creep into houses, and make captive weak women, laden with sins, carried away by divers evil desires, always learning and never able to gain a knowledge of the truth. But as Jannes and Jambres contended against Moses, so they contend against the truth; men whose minds are corrupt, and whose faith is unsound. But they will not proceed far; for their folly will be manifest to all, as was that of Jannes and Jambres." *

Who "those men" were, of whom St. Paul thus speaks, appears from what precedes in the Epistle. "Put men in mind of these things," he says, (that is, of certain fundamental truths of Christianity, which he had just expressed,) "adjuring them before the Lord not to engage in idle disputes, which profit nothing, but subvert the hearers. . . . Avoid those profane babblings; for these men will go on to greater impiety; and their doctrine will eat into them like a gangrene. Of their number are Hymenæus and Philetus, who have erred from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and who are subverting the faith of some. . . . In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, and some for honorable and others for mean uses. If, then, one keep himself clear from those things, he shall be a vessel for honor. . . . Avoid those foolish and unlearned discussions, knowing that they produce strife." †—The great body of catholic Christians was continually throwing off these disorders, and separating itself from them. But there can be no reason to doubt the existence of such disorders among the

* 2 Timothy iii. 1-9.

† 2 Timothy ii. 14-23.

heretical as well as pseudo-Christian sects of the second and subsequent centuries.

There is no historical evidence which justifies us in believing, that what assumes to be a second Epistle of Peter, and that which has been ascribed to the Apostle Jude, were the works of those authors; and the character and contents of the writings are unfavorable to the supposition. The ancient Christians are not responsible for any error concerning their authorship; for it does not appear that they were generally considered as genuine during the first three centuries. It seems to me most probable, that they were composed in the first half of the second century, under the names of those Apostles; and that the writer of each assumed a character not his own, rather by way of rhetorical artifice, than with intentional fraud. In both, individuals of depraved morals are described as existing among Christians, in language, which, if not that of the Apostles, we may consider as declamatory and exaggerated, but cannot look upon as without foundation. It appears that those spoken of were not yet wholly separated from the communion of catholic Christians; "They are hidden rocks in your love-feasts,"* it is said. But they are spoken of as those "who are making a separation;"† and the feelings, expressed toward them in these Epistles, are such as must have produced their severance from the Catholic body. They were not only immoral in their lives, but "false teachers, secretly bringing in destructive heresies;"‡ and the language used may suggest the inference, that these were Gnostic heresies. Thus it is said, that they "denied the Sovereign Lord who bought them, and our Lord Jesus Christ;"§ meaning, we may suppose, that they denied that the Creator was the Supreme God, and held opinions concern-

* Jude, verse 12. Comp. 2 Peter ii. 13, where ἀγῶναι seems probably the true reading.

† Jude, verse 19. Οἱ ἀποδιρρίζοντες the word ἐαυτοὺς, which follows in the received text, does not appear to be genuine.

‡ 2 Peter ii. 1.

§ 2 Peter ii. 1. Jude 4.

ing Christ so contradictory to the truth, as to amount to a denial of his real character. To the pretension of the Gnostics, that they alone were spiritual, and possessed of true knowledge, the writers may be supposed to refer, indignantly and contemptuously, when they describe those of whom they speak, as “animal, not having the spirit,”* as “speaking evil of what they understand not,” and as “brute beasts, governed by instinct, made to be taken and destroyed.”† “They promised men freedom,” it is said, “while they themselves were slaves of corruption;”‡ language corresponding to the representations of the early fathers concerning the pretensions and character of many among the Gnostics. It may be added, that they taught for money: “Through covetousness,” it is said, “they will make a gain of you by fraudulent discourses;”§ and they are compared to Balaam, who “loved the wages of unrighteousness,”|| having been tempted by the bribes of Balak. “Woe for them,” says the author of the Epistle ascribed to Jude, “for they have walked in the way of Cain, and given themselves up to deceive, like Balaam, for pay, and brought destruction on themselves through rebellion, like Corah.”¶—It is not, perhaps, improbable, that these epistles were written about the time that Gnosticism was first making its appearance, and before it had yet acquired any reputable or able leaders.

The date of the Apocalypse is uncertain; but it is, I think, to be referred either to the latter part of the first, or the earlier part of the second, century. In the addresses to the seven churches of Asia, we find mention of the same vices, as existing among professed Christians, which we have before remarked; and in speaking of them, Balaam is introduced under a point of view different from that in which he appears in the Epistles ascribed to Peter and Jude. Thus, in the

* Jude 19.

† 2 Peter ii. 19.

|| Ibid. verse 15.

† 2 Peter ii. 12. Jude 10.

§ Ibid. verse 3.

¶ Jude 11.

address to the church at Pergamus, it is said; "But I have a few things against thee, for thou hast those who follow the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak how to cause the Israelites to offend, by eating idol-sacrifices and committing fornication; so hast thou, too, those who thus follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans;"*—that is, thou, too, hast those who eat idol-sacrifices and commit fornication. The Nicolaitans are also mentioned once before;† and this appellation appears to be used as equivalent to "followers of Balaam," the significance of "Balaam" in Hebrew, and "Nicolaüs" in Greek, being the same. The name Nicolaitans was subsequently applied to Gnostics who led licentious lives, till at last it came to be considered as the name of a sect.‡ This sect was then supposed to derive its origin from Nicolaüs§ (Nicholas), one of the seven deacons appointed by the Apostles.|| The fable, for such it is to be considered, is rejected by Clement of Alexandria, who gives an account of Nicolaüs, perhaps equally unfounded, in which he is represented as an ascetic.¶ The Nicolaitans are the sect before referred to** as, according to Clement, perverting the maxim, that "the body must be abused," which he ascribes to Nicolaüs.

It appears, then, that, from the times of the Apostles, immoral doctrines and practices had existed among professed Christians, and that, due allowance being made for the language of controversial enmity, and for charges brought against Christian Gnostics, which, so far as they were true, were true only of sects not Christian, there is still no reason to doubt, that the principles of a portion of the Gnostics did not secure them from the common vices of the Pagan world; and that there were those among them, who perverted their

* Revelation ii. 14, 15.

† Ibid. ii. 6.

‡ Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 26. § 3. p. 105. Conf. Lib. iii. c. 11. § 1. p. 188.

§ Ibid.

|| Acts vi. 5.

¶ Stromat. ii. § 20. pp. 490, 491. Stromat. iii. § 1. p. 522, 523.

** See p. 79.

doctrines to defend themselves in criminal irregularities. The character of the great body of Christians, founded on the requirements of our religion, the supervision exercised by their respective churches over the morals of individual members, their rejection from their number of those whose lives or whose principles were essentially unchristian,—these causes, in connection with the persecution which they suffered from without, were continually operating to produce a separation between them and such individuals as have been described. But there was nothing to prevent such individuals from forming, or from joining, a looser class of heretics, and announcing themselves as Gnostics, or, in other words, as peculiarly enlightened.

Many of the first converts to Christianity must, as we have seen, have had but very imperfect information concerning it. Former prejudices still retained a strong hold on their minds. In the effervescence of the times, false teachers soon arose. The doctrine of the Apostles was resisted on the one hand, and perverted on the other. Such being the state of things in the first century, the way was prepared for the existence, in the second century, of doctrines as remote from Christianity as those of the Gnostics. They were the fruit of errors that had sprung up when the Gospel was planted, and had accompanied its growth.

During the second century, all those distinctly recognised as heretics among the Gentile converts were, or were represented to be, Gnostics. As has been before observed, it was natural that an ill-informed convert, possessed with the common prejudices of the Gentiles, should adopt the Gnostic doctrine concerning the Old Testament and the God of the Jews. It was equally natural, that one who had become separated from the great body of Christians by an immoral life, if he did not renounce his religion altogether, should join a body of heretics, whose extraordinary pretensions at once afforded a cover for his vices, and a gratification to his vanity. He would pass over to the looser class of theosophic Gnostics.

Thus it may be conceived, that, in the second century, those irregularities and vices settled down among them, which, in the first century, appear diffused through the body of Christians.

We have had occasion to bring into view the disorders among Christians, that unquestionably existed during the apostolic age. But we must be careful not to have an exaggerated idea of their nature or extent. They were such as could not but attend so wonderful a change of thought and feeling as our religion produced, and the formation of a body of Christians in the midst of such a world as lay around them. In the latter half of the second century, the catholic Christians were, as I have said, preëminently distinguished by their religious character and high morality; and are liable as a community to no graver charge, than that their virtues bordered on asceticism, austerity, and enthusiasm. The commotion in men's minds produced by the first preaching of our religion had subsided. It was better understood. The books of the New Testament, and especially the Gospels, were now open to the examination of all, and afforded means for studying its history and character. The great body of Christians, who were united in a common faith, had been purified by severe sufferings and persecution, and by the discipline which they maintained among themselves. They were a new class of men, standing in contrast with their heathen contemporaries; and the grosser vices of the world found either no entrance or no toleration among them. But it is not strange if the overwhelming licentiousness of the times forced itself in, where the weaker faith and the erroneous doctrines of the Gnostics presented a feebleness of resistance, or opened a way for its admission.

But this subject requires some further explanation. We may readily understand why, at the present day, individuals without Christian faith, or without Christian morals, should

claim to be called Christians, or why the generality of men in a Christian country, whatever may be the strength of their faith, or its practical influence, should acquiesce in being numbered as believers; but the inquiry may well arise, how it was, that, when to be a Christian was to expose oneself to hatred and persecution, any should take that name, except from such sincere conviction, and such conscientious motives as would preserve them from indulging in the vices of the heathen world, and especially from justifying such indulgence on principle. The solution of the fact is, that the looser heretics did not expose themselves to persecution. The hatred of the Heathens to the Christians manifested itself by irregular outbreaks. It would be a great mistake to suppose, that the proceedings against them, at least before the latter part of the third century, resembled the systematized persecution of infidels and heretics in those Roman-Catholic countries where the inquisition has been established. The steady action of law was unknown throughout the Roman Empire. Its machinery was wholly out of order. Its workings were irregular and interrupted. The government was a government of force. After the time of Nero till that of Diocletian, the Emperors, for the most part, appear rather to have yielded to the spirit of persecution, than to have excited it. The sufferings of the Christians were occasioned far less by their edicts, than by the superstition and enmity of the lower classes, the cruelty of some of the provincial governors, and the license and rapacity of the soldiery. Such persecutors would, in general, select their victims from the most conscientious and zealous among the number of those, who, from their circumstances in life, might be most easily oppressed, or who, being conspicuous among Christians, had, at the same time, incurred some particular odium. The more licentious among the heretics had little to fear. They, probably, called themselves Gnostics, or enlightened men, rather than Christians; for the latter name might not only have exposed them to obloquy and danger, but would have confounded them

with the great body of believers, whom they looked down upon with contempt. They were connected with the heathen world in its vices and in its idol-worship. Nor, by a man devoid of conscientiousness and self-devotion, was danger to be apprehended, even if, by some accident, he might be accused as a Christian. The judicial trials of Christians were very unlike those of heretics in later times. The accused had his condemnation or acquittal in his own power. He might save himself by renouncing his faith, or by denying it. All that was required of him was to profess himself not a Christian, and to burn incense before the judge in honor of an idol, or to swear by the Genius of the Emperor.

It appears, indeed, that many of the theosophic Gnostics withdrew themselves from that severe discipline of persecution, to which the catholic Christians were exposed, and which tended essentially to preserve their moral energy, their spiritual character, and their high tone of virtue. Tertullian has a discourse, written with all his usual vehemence, against such as dissuaded from martyrdom. It is entitled, *Scorpiace*, that is, "An Antidote against Scorpions;" for to scorpions he compares those, whom he considered as endeavouring to instil poison into others, which would cause their spiritual death. "When the faith," he says, "is vexed with fire, and the church is in the midst of flames, like the burning bush, then the Gnostics break out, then the Valentinians creep forth, then all the opposers of martyrdom are made active by the heat to strike, to dart their stings, and to kill."* They taught, that to profess the faith at the cost of life, was not required by God, who desires the death of no man, but was an act of folly. The true profession they maintained to be the holding of the true doctrine in the sight of God, not a profession made openly before men. Similar principles and a corresponding practice are charged upon the heretics generally by Irenæus; though he admits that there had been martyrs from their number. The Gnostics, according to him,

* *Scorpiace*, c. 1. p. 487.

maintained that it was not necessary to submit to martyrdom. Their doctrine was the true attestation of their faith.* "Some," he says, "have had the hardihood to despise martyrs, and to cast censure on those who are put to death for the profession of the Lord."† The same account is given of one portion of the heretics by Clement of Alexandria. Through an irreligious and cowardly love of life, he says, they represented martyrdom as self-murder; maintaining that the true Christian testimony was not a martyr's testimony, but their own higher knowledge of Him who is really God. Clement, however, says, that other heretics (referring, doubtless, to the Marcionites) were, through enmity to the Creator, eager to expose themselves to martyrdom.‡ A writer quoted by Eusebius observes, that some heretical sects had furnished many martyrs, and particularly mentions the Marcionites as claiming this distinction.§

Among the theosophic Gnostics, the ascetics, we may presume, were equally ready with the Marcionites to suffer when their faith required it. Of the practice and the doctrine of others of that class of Gnostics, but especially of the principles of their leaders, we may judge in some degree from a passage of the Valentinian, Heracleon, preserved by Clement of Alexandria,|| a part of which has been already quoted. It, at once, serves to explain, and to give credibility to, what is said concerning them by their catholic opponents. In commenting on the words of Jesus, in which he speaks of that profession of him, which his disciples were required to make before men, and especially before those in authority, Heracleon says, that there is a profession which is made by faith and conduct, and another by words; that the latter, which is made before those in authority, is erroneously considered by most as the only profession; but that it may be made by hypocrites, and that it has not been made by all those

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. iv. c. 33. § 9. p. 272.

† Stromat. iv. § 4. p. 571.

|| Stromat. iv. § 9. pp. 595, 596.

† Ibid. Lib. iii. c. 18. § 5. p. 210.

§ Hist. Eccles. Lib. v. c. 16.

Tertullian, when he wrote this tract, had become a Montanist ; and the Holy Spirit, which the Montanists believed to have spoken by Montanus, they commonly denominated the Paraclete.

There is as great a difference between the treatise of Origen and that of Tertullian, as may well exist between two works of able writers, relating to the same subject, and having nearly the same purpose. That of Origen is of particular interest. It was addressed, during a time of persecution, to two friends, with one of whom he appears to have been particularly connected, to exhort them to meet suffering and death with Christian fortitude. When we can bring before our minds all that is implied in one friend's writing to another to encourage him to martyrdom, we may, in one respect, have a distinct conception of the state and character of the early catholic Christians. The address of Origen is affectionate, considerate, and respectful, but with no expression of temporary excitement. On the contrary, it has something of his usual languor and diffuseness of style, and over-subtlety of thought. It is characterized by the calmness of one who was thoroughly penetrated by the spirit of our religion, whose earthly passions had been subdued, whose hopes were fixed on heaven ; and who had thus learned to look on life and death indifferently, and to contemplate suffering as one prepared for it.

"I would," says Origen, "that you may be able through the whole of this present conflict to bear in mind the great reward which is laid up in Heaven for those who are persecuted and reviled for righteousness' sake, and for the sake of the Son of Man ; so as to rejoice, and exult, and leap for joy, as the apostles in former days rejoiced, when they were deemed worthy to suffer contumely for him. Would, indeed, that your souls may not be at all perturbed, but that, when standing before the tribunal, and when the naked sword hangs over your throats, you may be strengthened by the peace of God which passes all understanding, and made

calm by the thought, that they who are absent from the body are present with the Lord of All. But if we are not able always to preserve our firmness, I would at least that our trouble may not appear, and show itself to those who are alien from our faith." *

"Whether our profession of Christ be complete or not, we may thus determine, If, through the whole time of the inquisition and temptation, we yield no place in our hearts to the Devil, who would corrupt us with evil thoughts of denying our faith, or cause us to hesitate, or pervert us by some sophistry to what is at enmity with a martyr's testimony and our perfection; if, with this, we bring no stain upon ourselves by any word foreign from our profession; if we endure all the reproach, and mockery, and laughter, and reviling of our adversaries, and the pity which they seem to have for us, regarding us as in error and foolish, and speaking to us as deluded; and, still more, if the strong love of children, or their mother, or any of those dearest to us in this world, do not violently draw us back to their enjoyment or to this life; but, turning from them all, we can devote ourselves wholly to God, and to that life which is with him, as about to be associated with his Only Son and with his followers;—then we may say, that we have fully perfected our profession." †

The tone of mind expressed by Tertullian and Origen is very different from that of Heracleon. It is to men possessed with their spirit, that we are indebted, through the providence of God, for the preservation of Christianity. Wholly relieved, as we are, from the necessity of practising those high and hard duties which were appointed to them, we may be unable, without an effort, to enter into their principles and feelings. Looking, under very different circumstances, to the severe sufferings to which they were summoned, and wholly unprepared to meet them by any preparatory disci-

* *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, § 4. Origen. *Opp.* i. 276.

† *Ibid.* § 11. p. 281.

pline, we may even shrink from sympathy, and feel rather with those who fled, or bought off their accusers, in times of persecution. But let us at least be just, and give honor where honor is due; and not suffer our attention to be engrossed by the extravagance that sometimes marked the strength of those virtues which the early Christians displayed, and almost necessarily accompanied them in such minds as Tertullian's.*

I have spoken of the Gnostics as they existed in the second century, and of the charges brought against them by the *early* fathers, the fathers of the second and third centuries. Beyond this time, there is, as I have before remarked, little reason to believe, that any proper Gnostic sects survived in much vigor. Their doctrines were such as strike with the glare of novelty, and are thrown aside when that becomes tarnished. They were superseded by the kindred sect of the Manichæans. Through the union of Christianity with the imperial power, a flood of corruption poured in among Christians; and a variety of new, bitter, worldly controversies arose, in the fourth century, which diverted men's attention from the old errors of the Gnostics, except as a matter of history, and a means of blackening the name of heretic by odious representations of those who had borne it. There is

* Gibbon (ch. xvi. note 100) says, that the treatise of Tertullian is "filled with the wildest fanaticism, and the most incoherent declamation." That a work such as I have described should appear to a writer like Gibbon expressive of the wildest fanaticism, may easily be supposed. But the assertion that it is full of incoherent declamation is utterly unfounded. No writer ever kept his purpose more steadily in view, than does Tertullian in this treatise.

Very probably, Gibbon had never read it, but he had perhaps seen what is said by Jortin: "In the persecution under Severus, many fled to avoid it, or gave money to redeem themselves. Tertullian, like a frantic Montanist, condemned these expedients." (Remarks on Ecclesiastical History. Lond. 1805. Vol. ii. p. 90.)—Jortin was a scholar of some elegance and some acuteness, but of little compass of mind, and wanting almost every requisite essential in treating of the history of the early Christians. In aiming at smartness of style he sometimes falls into flippancy.

no reason to doubt, that the Gnostics who still remained, shared in the degeneracy of that evil age, when darkness was beginning to close over men, and they were about to enter on that long series of centuries, that marks the history of the world with its mental and moral desolation. But the specific charges urged against the Gnostics by the orthodox historians of heresy in the fourth and fifth centuries, with Epiphanius at their head, are so obviously in great part calumnies, as to afford no safe ground for determining what was, or what had been, the character of those against whom they are brought. I have, in a note at the end of this volume, stated some facts which show with what incredulity we may be justified in regarding them.*

It appears, then, from what precedes, that there was great diversity of moral character among the Gnostics. Some were distinguished for their severe asceticism, and others for their principled licentiousness. The inveterate prejudices of the Gentiles against the Jews, and Judaism, the traditionary errors of the Jews concerning their religion, the form, consequently, in which it was presented to the minds of the new converts, and their inability to comprehend the subject correctly, and to solve, in a satisfactory manner, the difficulties with which it was and is embarrassed, caused a portion of the Gentile converts to separate the Mosaic dispensation from the Christian, and to regard the latter alone as coming from the Supreme Being. These were the Gnostics. But the arbitrary hypothesis of a Supreme God and an inferior god, by which the Gnostics made a forced separation of Judaism from Christianity, and the inconsistency of their scheme with the plain language of Christ and his Apostles, spread confusion and indistinctness through all their conceptions of our religion. Notwithstanding this, the Marcionites, influenced more by moral and Christian feeling, than by any other cause, in rejecting the representations of the Old Testament as ap-

* See Additional Note C.

plicable to the true God, did not fall behind the catholic Christians in the strictness or strength of their self-denying virtues. On the contrary, there seems to have been much of fanaticism mixed with their renunciation of the pleasures of this life. But the theosophic Gnostics were less detached from the heathen world. They drew their vague speculations from its philosophy. There was a tendency in their minds to substitute for the realities of God's revelation, a baseless, abstract faith, the evidence of which was the testimony of their own spiritual nature. They seem to have regarded Christianity too much as a system of philosophy, and too little as a divine revelation. They thus stood as a sort of intermediate class between the catholic Christians and the Heathens. Many of them, doubtless, received our religion in good faith, according to their modification of it, and conformed their lives to the moral purity which it requires; but it does not appear, that any considerable number felt it to be a means of the moral renovation of mankind, or regarded themselves as called upon to seal their testimony to it with their blood. It is clear, that they had not that zeal in avowing and defending and propagating their faith, as of inestimable value to their fellow men, which exposed the catholic Christians to persecution. Some of them, pretending, perhaps, as men of enlightened minds, to hold in disregard outward forms of religion, joined, of their own accord, in idol-sacrifices; while others, like the ancient heathen philosophers, were probably ready to escape odium and vexation by whatever compliances were necessary with the popular superstitions. It appears, further, that there were some, perhaps many of their number, who, though not countenanced by their principal leaders, or the more respectable portion of the theosophic Gnostics, seized on the doctrine of the incorruptible purity of their spiritual nature, as a pretence for indulging in gross vices. The existence of such a class of men, not altogether destitute of belief in the divine mission of our Saviour, is, as we have seen, accounted for by causes that had been in operation from

the time when St. Paul first gathered converts from the Gentiles. They were early thrown off from the body of catholic Christians, and became apostates or heretics. It may readily be believed, that they had no attachment to Judaism which would prevent them from becoming Gnostics, and, in the pride of their new spiritual superiority, looking down upon the unenlightened and over-scrupulous body of Christians, by whom they were rejected. In taking this course they met with no obstacle; for among the generality of theosophic Gnostics there was no combination or discipline, which might have repelled or excluded the unworthy from being associated with them.

Nor was there anything precisely to define the limits between the theosophic Gnostics and individuals holding Gnostic opinions, and more or less affected by the widely spreading influence of Christianity, who yet had no title to the name of Christians. But, though the limits were undefined, there was the well-marked general distinction between those who decidedly belonged to one class or the other, that the former believed, and the latter did not believe, the divine mission of Christ. In respect, also, to one noted pseudo-Christian sect, which has been mistaken for a branch of the Gnostics, I mean the Carpocratians, it will appear, I think, from what is about to be said, that its members did not even hold Gnostic doctrines. We must, therefore, separate, as far as possible, the pseudo-Christians from the Gnostics; and to this subject we will next attend.

CHAPTER IV.

ON SOME PSEUDO-CHRISTIAN SECTS AND INDIVIDUALS,
WHO HAVE BEEN IMPROPERLY CONFOUNDED WITH
THE Gnostics.

WE have seen that Simon Magus is represented by the fathers as the parent of all the heretical sects, while, at the same time, he is described not as a disciple of Christ, but as opposing himself to Christ as a rival. His followers, the Simonians, therefore, were not Christians. These facts may induce us readily to give credit to the supposition, that among those who may seem to be, or who are, enumerated as Christian heretics, by some one or more of the fathers, there were other sects or individuals who had no title to the name of Christian; though many of them may have held the Gnostic doctrine, that the material universe is the work of a being or beings imperfect or evil. This confusion, if it exist, of Christian and pseudo-Christian sects must be removed, before we can form a correct notion of the Gnostics; and the investigation of the subject may also serve to make us acquainted with the character of the times, and the effects produced by the promulgation of Christianity.

Among the sects referred to, the *Carpocratians* may be first mentioned. They had their origin in Alexandria, and became conspicuous about the middle of the second century. By Irenæus they are classed with the Gnostics; and, according to him, they affirmed that the world was made by angels. But a comparison of his whole account* with the information

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 25. pp. 103-105. c. 28. § 2. p. 107. Lib. ii. cc. 31-33. pp. 164-168.

afforded by Clement of Alexandria* may lead us to the conclusion, that the Carpocratians were neither Christians, nor heathen Gnostics, but a corrupt sect of Platonists, who pretended to regard Christ as a very eminent philosopher among the Barbarians, as Confucius was at one time celebrated by European men of letters. This may appear from what follows.

With Carpocrates was connected, as a founder of the sect, his son Epiphanes, the author of a work "Concerning Justice," from which Clement quotes a series of passages.† The purpose of them is to maintain that no property should exist, but that all things should be common to all. "The justice of God," Epiphanes says, "is a certain equal distribution."‡ Following out his principles, he maintains, as Plato had taught in his Republic, that there should be a community of women;—women in Egypt and Greece, as in the East, being regarded much in the light of property. For his doctrine of equality he argues from the natural order of things; according to which, for example, God gives the light of the sun equally to all; and a common nature, and food in common, to all the individuals of the different species of animals. This order he vindicates as good, he regards it as a manifestation of the great moral law of all beings, and ascribes it to the "Maker and Father of All," that is, to the Supreme God.

It appears, therefore, that Epiphanes regarded the order of nature as good, and as proceeding from the Supreme Being. He differed, therefore, from the Gnostics in their fundamental doctrine. They considered the order of nature as full of defects and evils, and ascribed it, in consequence, to an imperfect Creator. But Epiphanes, it is clear, had no such being in view. He ascribes the constitution of things in the material universe to the Supreme God, whom alone he regards as the Creator. He was, moreover, so far from holding the

* Stromat. iii. § 2. pp. 511-515.

† Stromat. iii. ubi supra.

‡ Τὴν δικαιοσύνην τοῦ Θεοῦ κοινωνίαν τινὰ εἶναι μετ' ἰσότητος. p. 512.

doctrine of the Gnostics, which identified the Creator with the God of the Jews, that, as quoted by Clement, he considered the command, "Thou shalt not covet" as ridiculous, and more especially the command, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife;"—they being, according to him, directly opposite to the ordinances of the Creator as manifested in his works. Epiphanes, then, was not a Gnostic, nor was his father Carpocrates, from whom he derived his principles, nor the followers of both, by whom they were adopted. Nor had they, I conceive, more title to be considered as Christians.

It is the obvious remark of Clement, that the doctrines alleged clearly subvert the Law and the Gospel. Upon their first aspect, they show themselves to be the doctrines of one, who had no deference for the divine authority of Christ. Their advocate, Epiphanes, was, according to him, a youth of extraordinary precocity, who died at the age of seventeen, after having been educated by his father in the different branches of knowledge, particularly in the Platonic philosophy. Clement says that his mother was a native of Cephalenia, and that in Same, a city of that island, a temple was erected to him as a god, and divine honors were paid him after his death. There seems no reasonable ground for doubting this account. There is nothing in it inconsistent with the customs of the Heathens. Clement lived in the same century with Epiphanes, and in the same city in which he was born; and the facts stated by him are of such a kind as hardly to admit the supposition of any essential mistake concerning them. But the followers of Epiphanes, who paid him divine honors, were evidently Heathens. In conformity with this, Irenæus tells us, that the Carpocratians had images of Christ, together with those of heathen philosophers, as Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, which they crowned with garlands, and honored after the fashion of the Gentiles.* It appears, therefore, that they placed Christ in the same rank with those philosophers. Some of them, he says, affirmed that

* .Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 25. § 6. p. 105.

they were like Jesus, and some that in certain respects they were stronger, or better.*

Respecting their other opinions, Irenæus states, that they believed, that "Jesus was the son of Joseph, and was like other men, except that his soul, being strong and pure, remembered what it had seen in its circumgyration with the unoriginated God."† These conceptions were founded on the doctrine of Plato, who had taught, in his Phædrus, the preëxistent immortality of all souls, and that those of the better class had, before their immersion in matter, ascended to the outer orb of heaven, where they had been borne round in company with the gods, and had beheld the eternal Ideas, there presented to view, of which all true knowledge is only a reminiscence.‡

Irenæus, attributing Gnostic conceptions to the Carpocratians, goes on to say, that, according to them, the soul of Jesus being thus excellent, "power was sent it by God to enable it to escape the Makers of the World, and passing through them all, and being wholly liberated, to ascend to him;" and that the same would be the case with all souls who followed his course. This conception of Makers of the World, disposed to impede the ascent of the soul, is Gnostic; but that Irenæus was in error in ascribing it to the Carpocratians, may appear by what has been quoted from Epiphanes. It seems to have been not uncommon to attribute incorrectly to

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 25. § 2. p. 103. Lib. ii. c. 32. § 3. p. 165.

† Ibid. Lib. i. c. 25. § 1. p. 103.

‡ Plato in Phædro, p. 245 seqq. (I refer here, as elsewhere, to the pages of Henry Stephen's edition (Paris 1578), which are commonly numbered in the margin of later editions.) Plato puts the representations, there given, into the mouth of Socrates. They appear irreconcilable with those concerning the creation, and the preëxistent state of souls, given in his Timæus, p. 41, seqq. But his imaginations at different times were not unfrequently at variance with each other.—The words of Plato, in his Phædrus, in speaking of the vision of eternal Ideas presented to preëxistent souls, as borne round on the outer orb of heaven, are so characteristic of ancient philosophy as to be worth quoting: "This super-celestial place," he says, "no poet here on earth has ever celebrated or will celebrate worthily. *But thus it is; for one must dare to describe it truly, especially one who is discoursing of the truth.*" p. 247.

one sect, opinions held, or reputed to be held, by another. The mistake of Irenæus may have arisen in this way alone; or it may be otherwise accounted for. Through the irregular action of Christianity upon their minds, and the consequent unsettling of their old faith, the Carpocratians may have advanced so far toward the opinions of the catholic Christians, as to regard the inferior gods of the later Platonists, the heathen divinities, as evil spirits; and, if this were so, Irenæus might easily confound those inferior gods with the creator-angels of the Gnostics. That such was the case may be conjectured from what he states to have been said by them, namely, that the soul of Jesus had learned to despise the Makers of the World in consequence of having been educated among the Jews.* No Gnostic would have represented Jesus as learning to despise the Makers of the World, among whom they commonly regarded the god of the Jews as the chief, in consequence of his being imbued with Jewish notions; but the Carpocratians, if such as we have supposed them, might well have assigned this as a cause for his contempt of the heathen divinities. It can hardly be, that the account of Irenæus is not erroneous.

The morals of the Carpocratians are portrayed in very dark colors by their contemporaries Irenæus and Clement. They represent the sect as having brought reproach on the Christian name;—upon “us,” says Irenæus, “who have no communion with them either in doctrine, or in morals, or in daily life.”† The Heathens, doubtless, were very ready to impute to Christians the vices and licentiousness of those whose minds had merely been put in action by the new faith, of those bands of outlaws, who, not belonging to the number of the true followers of our religion, yet accompanied its march, and hovered round its outposts. Some modern writers have been disposed to regard the charges brought against the Carpocra-

* *Jesu autem dicunt animam in Judæorum consuetudine nutritam contempsisse eos [fabricatores mundi].* Lib. i. c. 25. § 1. p. 103.

† Lib. i. c. 25. § 3. p. 103.

tians by their contemporaries as improbable, and in great part unfounded. But their principal argument is, that the Carpocratians were Christians, and that Christians could not have been guilty of such immoralities. If, on the contrary, we regard them as Heathens, on whom the indirect and irregular influence of Christianity had had no other effect than to set them free from the restraints of common opinion, and who, in consequence, were inflated with a notion of their superiority to common prejudices, we shall perceive that they were in the very state, in which moral disorders might be expected to break out among them. The charges against them are to a great extent confirmed by the principles of Epiphanes, whom they deified. These are advanced in the broadest manner in the extracts from him given by Clement. He maintained that all laws for the security of private property were in violation of the universal law of God, which had given all things in common to all; and that they alone created the offences which they punished.* This indeed may be considered as little more than a speculative principle, since society imposes such severe penalties on those who act in conformity to it, that none are likely to reduce it to practice from a mere conviction of its truth. But his doctrine respecting the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, which not only broke down all moral restraint, but represented it as an ordinance of God, is sufficient, especially when we consider the state of society in which it was promulgated, to remove any doubt concerning the truth of the licentiousness of which the Carpocratians were accused. They were heathen philosophers, and Christian chastity was not to be learned from heathen philosophy. They were, as we have supposed, of the school of Plato, and in two of his most noted Dialogues they might have found a mixture of philosophical jargon with nameless impurity.†

* Οἱ νόμοι—παρανομεῖν ἐδίδαξαν. Ἡ γὰρ ἰδιότης τῶν νόμων τὴν κοινωνίαν τοῦ θεοῦ νόμου κατέτεμεν καὶ παρατρώγει.—Τύ τ' ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ σὸν, φησὶ, διὰ τῶν νόμων παρεισελεῖν.—Ἡ δὲ κοινωνία παρανομηθεῖσα, καὶ τὰ τῆς ἰσότητος, ἐγέννησε θρεμμάτων καὶ καρπῶν κλέπτην. pp. 512, 513.

† I refer to the Phædrus and the Banquet, "amatoria colloquia καὶ παιδευαστικά."

Nor is there any reason to question what Irenæus says of them,* that they, like the later Platonists, professed the science and practice of magic or theurgy, and used their pretended skill for the purpose of deception.

I have reserved for a separate head the mention of one doctrine which Irenæus imputes to them ; because, so far as it may appear to have been held by any individuals, it connects them in a class with other *pseudo-Christians, maintaining that the practice of scandalous immoralities was a religious duty*. As followers of Plato, the Carpocratians believed the doctrine of the preëxistence and transmigration of souls ; and maintained, says Irenæus, that the soul would not obtain its final liberation from matter till it had been conversant with every kind of life and every mode of action ; that is, as he explains their meaning, till it had been conversant with every kind of impurity and vice.† A strong doubt may at once arise whether such a doctrine could have been professed by any individuals ; and the idea of acting upon it, to its full extent, appears altogether monstrous and incredible. Irenæus himself says, that he could not believe that their practice corresponded to their principles. What, indeed, were the principles or the practice of certain libertine individuals of the second century, called Carpocratians, whether they were more immoral than some have supposed, or less immoral than their opponents represented, is a subject that may seem wholly uninteresting at the present day. Certainly it is so, as far as justice to their memory is concerned. But, on the other hand, if they held the doctrine imputed to them by Irenæus, or if they held any doctrine which, without being greatly misrepresented, might afford occasion for the statement which he makes, this is a phenomenon in human nature that may well deserve attention.

* Cont. Hæres Lib. i. c. 25. § 3. p. 103. Lib. ii. c. 31. § 2. p. 164. c. 32. § 3. p. 165.

† Lib. i. c. 25. § 4. pp. 103, 104. Lib. ii. c. 32. § 2. p. 165.

That they did hold some doctrine of this kind, and that he did not essentially mistake their meaning, may appear from various considerations. Irenæus affirms, that it was expressed in their writings ; and that they taught that Jesus had communicated it privately to his Apostles and disciples, and had appointed them to communicate it to those who were worthy and obedient. They would not have maintained that a doctrine concerning morals had been taught privately, if it had been such as was correspondent to the tenor of the Gospels. He says, that they accommodated to their doctrine the words of our Saviour, " Agree with thine adversary quickly ; " representing the adversary as Satan, one of the angels of the world, who would not suffer the soul to obtain its freedom from imprisonment in some mortal body, *till it had paid the uttermost farthing* ; that is, according to his explanation, till it had been conversant in all the works of this world. His appeal to their writings, and the particulars which he gives relating to their doctrine, serve to show, that, if his account is not true to the letter, it still had an essential foundation in truth. It is repeated by other writers, particularly by Tertullian, who says,* that they represented " crimes as the tribute which life must pay ; " *facinora tributa sunt vitæ* ; and notes the same perversion of Scripture that is mentioned by Irenæus.

The doctrine in question, stated in its least offensive form, we may, perhaps, conceive to have been, that the soul must have full experience of this life before passing into another state, and that to this end it must be conversant with pleasures commonly considered criminal. To represent indulgence in such pleasures as a matter of religious obligation, was conformable to the teaching of Epiphanes, that promiscuous intercourse of the sexes was an ordinance of God. Irenæus concludes his account of the moral principles of the Carpocratians with saying, that they taught, that men were " saved by faith and love, but that other things were indifferent ; that, according to the opinions of men, some were

* De Animâ, c. 35. p. 291.

accounted good and others bad, but that nothing was bad by nature." * By faith they may have meant a firm adherence to their philosophy; for to souls purified by philosophy Plato assigned the highest places after death. But in what they said of faith and love we may recognise, perhaps, a common tendency of those most licentious in their speculations or their practice to shelter themselves under a show of words expressive of common sentiments or belief.

It may appear, then, that the Carpocratians belonged to the same class with those pseudo-Christians mentioned by Clement of Alexandria as quoted in the last chapter.† The principle common to them all was, that the practice of scandalous immoralities was a matter of religious obligation. It may be observed, in connection, that the charges brought against them, however general may be the terms in which they are sometimes expressed, evidently relate principally to the vices of sensuality and profligacy.

The avowal of such a principle may strike us at first view as a moral absurdity scarcely credible. But it was in truth a principle with which Paganism had made men familiar, and which it had thoroughly sanctioned. In the heathen worship, gross indecencies, and abominable extravagances and debaucheries, were represented as acceptable to many of their gods, to Bacchus, Venus, Cybele, and Flora; not to mention other inferior divinities of a still baser character. The public celebration of many of the heathen rites was marked with deep stains of pollution. In Egypt, where brute animals were deified, heathen writers tell us (whether we can believe them or not), that abominations were committed in their worship, with which even those, that Epiphanius charges on the heretics whom he most vilifies, are not to be compared.‡

* Lib. i. c. 25. § 5. p. 104.

† See pp. 79-82.

‡ Gibbon (Ch. xv. Vol. ii. pp. 289-294) speaks, in contrast with the pious horrors and foolish scruples of the early Christians, of "the cheerful devotion," "the agreeable fictions," and "the beautiful mythology" of Paganism; and says, that, "on the days of solemn festivals," "superstition always wore the appearance of pleasure and often of virtue." He could hardly have used language

That such vices as the pseudo-Christians practised might make a part of religion was, therefore, the doctrine of the age. But, perhaps, the most remarkable analogy with their principles and practice is to be found in those of a sect that has long existed in India; the facts relating to which are so extraordinary as well to deserve notice. There was much connection between the superstitions of Egypt and of India; and in the former country many of those extravagances of doctrine that appeared in the first ages of Christianity had their origin. Striking analogies also exist between the religious doctrines of the Hindoos and those of the theosophic Gnostics; and it is not, therefore, strange, that small sects should have shown themselves among the pseudo-Christians and the Heathen Gnostics, similar to the one referred to in Hindostan, the members of which are called Vámis or Vámácharis. They are worshippers in particular of the Sakti, or female energy, of Siva, hypostatized as the goddess Devi. "The object of their worship is to obtain supernatural powers in this life, and to be identified after death with Siva and Sakti." In their principal ceremonies the Sakti is personified by a naked female; and conformably to the ritual prescribed in their sacred books, and to a very general belief, those ceremonies are "terminated by the most scandalous orgies among the votaries." These are religious observances; more unworthy of a philosopher, or less consonant to truth. The pagan mythology, the history of the pagan gods, when viewed in its naked deformity, appears a history of the coarse indulgence of animal propensities, and of acts of fraud, cruelty, and meanness. It everywhere outrages decency and humanity. The better part of the heathen philosophers, with Plato at their head, held it in very different esteem from what Gibbon expresses. The language respecting its fictions which Cicero puts into the mouth of the Stoic, Balbus (*De Natura Deorum*, Lib. ii. § 28), is among the shortest and mildest of their censures. "*Hæc et dicuntur et creduntur stultissime, et plena sunt futilitatis, summæque levitatis.*" It may be worth while to quote what even Gibbon himself elsewhere says (*Ch. iii. Vol. i. 112*): "We should disgrace the virtues of the Antonines by comparing them with the vices of Hercules or Jupiter. Even the characters of Cæsar or Augustus were far superior to those of the popular deities." The pagan rites were, in great part, conformed to the supposed characters of the divinities worshipped, and often bore direct allusion to the fables concerning them.

"for such practices, if merely for sensual gratification, are held by the sect to be as illicit and reprehensible as they are regarded by any other branch of the Hindoo faith." Such is the account of Professor Wilson.* By another writer it is said, that the Vámácharees "carry the gratification of the senses to an unlimited extent, under the hope, [or] rather under the pretence, of extinguishing them by satiety." †

* In the second part of his "Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindoos," published in the "Asiatic Researches." Vol. xvii. (Calcutta, 1832.) p. 221, seqq.

† See "The Friend of India," (quarterly series,) a periodical publication by the missionaries at Serampore. Vol. i. (1821.) p. 268, note. In the third volume of the same work, p. 628, seqq., there is an account of the Vámácharis, there called *Veeras*, similar to that given by Professor Wilson. This account of their doctrines and rites is taken from a work under review, published as a religious guide by an opulent native in 1828, being a "Compilation of the Precepts and Doctrines of the Tantras." The author of the article says; "In the chapter on the three classes of Tantrikas [the followers of the Tantras], the 'beasts,' who abstain from the licentious practices of the others, are aspersed without mercy. The *veeras*, who drink wine, frequent brothels, and live in a delirium of pleasure, are directed to associate with the initiated only, to partake of intoxicating drugs, to be violent and furious in their conduct, to anoint their bodies with ashes like madmen, never to abstain from liquor, to worship the gods with animal and even human sacrifices, and practise the Bhiruvee chukru, a circle in which the followers of the Tantras sit down indiscriminately, without reference to caste, to drink wine and eat flesh." It is said in the Tantras, that "the Vedas, and other writings esteemed sacred by the Hindoos, condemn these actions only when they are performed without previous purifications; when thus purified, they become holy and meritorious."

"The work," continues the author of the article, "advances in licentiousness, as it draws to a close;" and of this he gives sufficient exemplification. But it is not necessary to proceed further in an account of its abominations.

The Vámácharis are also described in Ward's "Account of the Writings, Religion, and Manners of the Hindoos." (Serampore, 1811.) Chap. iv. Sect. 6. Vol. iii. p. 27, seqq.

The directions for the worship of the Sakti are given by Professor Wilson only in the original Sanscrit; and the other writers mentioned refrain from detailing them as too abominably indecent. Professor Wilson says: "It is contrary to all knowledge of the human character to admit the possibility of these transactions in their fullest extent; and, though the worship of the Sakti according to the above outline may be sometimes performed, yet there can be little doubt of its being practised but seldom, and then in solitude and secrecy. In truth, few of the ceremonies, there is reason to believe, are ever observed." The Compiler of

Some further information concerning them may be found in the note below.

The doctrines, precepts, and ritual of the Vámácharis are given in the Tantras, books to which they ascribe authority superior to that of the Vedas. The existence of such "sacred books," directing the practice of the most impure rites, and enjoining a life, which is but one course of vice, as the means of perfection, and of identification after death with the Divinity, may open a new view of human nature, and serve to render credible what we could not else readily believe. Yet the rites observed in the worship of some of the gods of Greece, Rome, and Egypt, were in their nature similar to those imposed by the Tantras.

But, though we receive as essentially true the accounts of Irenæus and Clement respecting the pseudo-Christians whom we have been considering, we cannot extend the same credit to the outrageous charges, brought by writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, particularly by Epiphanius, against some of those whom they represented as heretics. There is a most offensive specimen of them in the account which that writer gives of a pretended sect, to which, with the confusion frequent in his writings, he applies the name of "*Gnostics*," *used not as a generic but a specific name*.* The origin of his appropriation of the term to a particular sect may be thus explained.

Irenæus speaks of the Gnostics whom he supposes to have existed antecedently to their being split into different sects, and called after different leaders, simply under that generic name, and uses the same general name also concerning those whom he does not refer to any particular class. Especially at

the Precepts and Doctrines of the Tantras says, that the commands respecting the worship of the Sakti are not binding in this age of iron. (Friend of India, iii. 630.) It is agreed, however, that the sect exists at the present day, with some of the tenets and practices described. Professor Wilson, in speaking of the worship of Kali or Dourga, as particularly prevalent in Bengal, says, that the rites observed almost place her worshippers among the Vámácharis.

* Hæres. xxvi. Opp. i. 82.

the conclusion of his first book, after having given an account of the principal Gnostic sects, distinguished by particular names, as referred to their respective leaders, he says, that beside these a multitude of Gnostics arose, whose different doctrines he proceeds to mention, without denoting those who held them by any specific appellations.* Among them were those who were afterwards named Ophians and Cainites. Irenæus likewise says, that the Carpocratians called themselves Gnostics;† by which appropriation of the name, they, of course, meant nothing more than that they were “enlightened men.”

The latter remark of Irenæus has led Eusebius to affirm, after speaking of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, and Basilides, that “Irenæus writes that Carpocrates was the father of another sect called that of the Gnostics.”‡ The passage is remarkable as showing how confused were the notions of Eusebius concerning the earlier heretics, and may lead to the conclusion that, in his time, they had almost sunk out of notice. In fact, he appears to have had little or no personal knowledge of them, and to have used Irenæus as his principal authority in speaking of them. Him, it seems, he had consulted so negligently, that among the various sects of Gnostics he thus appropriates the name to one, the Carpocratians,§ as if it belonged to them exclusively.

Apparently, Epiphanius, also, misapprehended Irenæus, mistaking his use of the term “Gnostics” as a generic name, in the passages before mentioned, for its use as a specific appellation, and, in consequence, formed a class of subordinate Gnostics.|| This fictitious sect (as I conceive it to be)

* Lib. i. cc. 29-31. p. 107, seqq.—In the first sentence of chapter twenty-ninth, the word “Barbelo” appears to be an interpolation.

† Lib. i. c. 25. § 6.

‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. iv. c. 7.

§ In appropriating it to the Carpocratians, he differs from Epiphanius, who distinguishes between the Carpocratians and his Gnostics; and who says (Opp. i. pp. 77, 82), that the latter had their origin from the Nicolaïtans.

|| Hæres. xxvi. Opp. i. 82, seqq.

he has loaded with charges of absurd doctrines, abominable crimes, and loathsome impurities. "Scruples are felt," says Beausobre, "about giving the lie to Epiphanius, who represents this sect as Christians; but, for myself, I feel much stronger scruples against ranking among Christian heretics, individuals who were the most profane of men, if what is said of them be true."* Certainly, such individuals as Epiphanius describes could not have been Christians; but it may further be observed, that his authority is not of a kind to afford ground for believing, that such individuals ever existed, supposing their existence possible. Epiphanius is a writer as deficient in plausibility, as in decency and veracity. He has in an extraordinary manner implicated his own character in his account; for after describing practices, which no mind not thoroughly corrupt could regard as other than ineffably odious, he asserts that he had gained his knowledge from women belonging to the sect, who, in his youth, had endeavoured to corrupt his virtue and seduce him to join it; † that he had been under strong temptation, but that God in his mercy had delivered him, in answer to his prayers and groans; and that then he had denounced the members of the sect, whose names had before been unknown, to the "bishops in that place," (what bishops, or what place, he does not specify,) and that "the city" (a nameless city) had in consequence been purged by the banishment of about eighty individuals. ‡

While, however, we reject in the gross the account of Epiphanius, as not true of any body of men, it does not follow that it is throughout a mere fabrication. There may have been in his age crazy and vicious fanatics, more or less resembling the Vāmācharis of India, who afforded a certain foundation

* *Histoire de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, Tome ii. p. 68.

† According to his own account, he was acquainted with the private sign, by which the members of the sect recognised each other. *Hæres.* xxvi. § 4. pp. 85, 86.

‡ *Hæres.* xxvi. § 17. pp. 99, 100.

for it. Some facts are also to be discovered in what Epiphanius has brought together. He mentions and quotes a book of some interest, of which he affords the only account, and concerning which there seems no reason to suspect him of mistake or falsehood. It was called the "Gospel of Eve," as containing the wisdom which Eve had learned from the Serpent.* That it was so called is one among the many proofs, which make evident what we shall hereafter have occasion to observe, that the title "Gospel" did not imply that a book to which it was given was a history of the ministry of Jesus. But this book is an object of curiosity for another reason. It appears from the single passage of it extant, quoted by Epiphanius, to have been founded on the Egyptian pantheism. Conformably to this, he says,† that those who used it believed that the *same* soul is dispersed in animals, and insects, and fishes, and serpents, and men, and in herbs and trees and fruits." The passage from the Gospel of Eve is to the following effect:‡ The writer, or the person represented as speaking, says; "I stood on a high mountain, and I saw a man of large stature, and another mutilated; and I heard, as it were, a voice of thunder, and I drew near to hearken, and it spoke to me and said, 'I am thou and thou art I; and wherever thou mayest be, there am I; and I am dispersed in all things; and from whatever place thou wouldst collect me, in collecting me, thou art collecting thyself.'"

What the two figures were intended to symbolize cannot, I think, be conjectured with any probability. But the words uttered, appear evidently to be an expression of the pantheistic doctrine, according to which all individual beings are but parts of the one, sole, self-subsistent being, the Universe. There is, perhaps, in the passage, an allusion to the fable of the mutilation of the body of Osiris by Typhon, and the collection of his members by Isis, which, when the absurdities of ancient mythology were transformed by the philosophers of later times into allegories, was mystically explained, as

* Hæres. xxvi. § 2. p. 84.

† Ibid. § 9. p. 90.

‡ Ibid. § 3. p. 84.

symbolizing the discription and disappearance of Ideas, the essential forms of things, the body of Osiris, through the action of the destructive powers of nature, personified as Typhon, and their being collected anew and re-adapted to their purpose by the receptive and nutritive powers, typified by Isis.* The analogy, also, is striking between the words said to be uttered and the inscription which Plutarch reports to have been engraved on the temple of Isis at Saïs ; “ I am all that has been, is, or will be ; ” † Isis being here personified as Universal Nature. It is to be observed, that there is great confusion in the Egyptian mythology, the same attributes being ascribed to different divinities. This confusion probably originated from the fact that one god was the peculiar object of veneration in one place, and another in another,

* Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride*, § 53. *Moral. Tom. ii. pp. 526, 527.* Edit. Wyttenbach.

† Ibid. § 9. p. 453. Plutarch concludes the inscription thus ; “ And my veil no mortal has ever lifted.” Proclus gives it with a different ending. That it was actually to be found on or in the temple at Saïs is very doubtful. But as regards our present purpose the question is unimportant ; since the report of Plutarch sufficiently shows the existence of this conception of Isis long before Epiphanius’s notice of the Gospel of Eve. See respecting this inscription, Jablonski’s *Pantheon Ægyptiorum*, P. i. Lib. i. c. 3. § 7 ; and Mosheim’s notes in his Latin translation of Cudworth’s *Intellectual System*, Tom. i. p. 510, seqq. and p. 522. Edit. Secund. In the last note Mosheim gives the correct reading of another remarkable inscription to Isis of similar import, found at Capua, which is to this effect : “ Aerrius Balbinus dedicates thee [that is a part of the universe, a stone] to thyself, who art one and all things, the goddess Isis.”

It may here be observed, that Cudworth should be read with the notes of Mosheim ; unless, indeed, one be so acquainted with the philosophy and religion of the ancients, and so accustomed to reasoning, and to estimating the power and the ambiguity of language, as to be able to correct for himself his deceptive representations. He deserves the highest praise for integrity as a writer ; his learning was superabundant, and his intellect vigorous enough to wield it to his purpose. But he transfers his own religious conceptions to the heathen philosophers and religionists, he infuses the sentiments of a modern theist into their words, and he confounds together the doctrines of those who preceded Christianity, and of those who were powerfully acted upon by its influence. He thus spreads a luminous cloud over the ancient heathen theology, which Mosheim has done something to dispel. Mosheim has likewise corrected many of the other errors of fact or mistakes of judgment, which run through the mass of Cudworth’s learning ; and has added much to illustrate the topics of which he treats.

so that the highest attributes were in different places ascribed to different gods; but it was at once both solved and aggravated by the mystical theology, which taught, that they were all only manifestations of Universal Nature,—each of them but different names for the “One and All,” considered under different relations.

From the title of the book mentioned by Epiphanius, that is, from its being called a “gospel,” from the circumstance that he ascribes its use to an heretical sect, and from the account given by him of the pantheistic opinions of this sect, we may infer that there were individuals, who blended conceptions borrowed from Christianity with the Egyptian mythology and pantheism, and who have been improperly represented as Christian heretics. Pseudo-Christians of like character appear to have existed in Egypt at an early period. We have some information, such as it is, concerning this subject in a curious letter of Hadrian, preserved by the Pagan historian Vopiscus.* The Emperor says; “Egypt, my dear Servian, which you recommended to me, I have found to be light, vacillating, and borne about by every rumour. Those who worship Serapis are Christians; and those who call themselves Christian bishops are devoted to Serapis. There is no ruler of a Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian priest, who is not an astrologer, a diviner, a leader of a sect.† The Patriarch‡ himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by

* In his Life of Saturninus.

† “A leader of a sect:” The Latin word is *alip̄tes*, which means *an anointer*, one who anoints those who have bathed, or the combatants for the arena. But, as it is not easy to perceive any appropriateness in this meaning, I have ventured to render the word in a sense of the Greek, ἀλειπτῆς, which is used metaphorically to signify *an inciter* or *leader*. Perhaps the Emperor wrote the word in Greek letters. But after all, in using the expressions which he does, *mathematicus*, *haruspex*, *alip̄tes*, he may have had in mind a line in Juvenal’s description of a needy Greek adventurer (Sat. iii. 76.), “Grammaticus, rhetor, geometres, pictor, alip̄tes;” and may thus, in employing the word *alip̄tes*, have intended only an expression of contempt.

‡ The Patriarch of the Jews must be meant; as the title and dignity of Patriarch were not known in the Christian church till long after the time of Hadrian.

some to worship Serapis, and by others, Christ." The Emperor may not have had the best opportunities for obtaining information respecting the state of religion among the Egyptians, and he may have trusted too much to the jeers of his courtiers; but, notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding the levity and obvious extravagance of his letter, we cannot suppose that what he says was wholly without foundation. Some state of things existed in Egypt in the first half of the second century which gave occasion to his representation. The minds of many, it may be presumed, were affected by Christianity, who had but a very imperfect knowledge of what Christianity was, and some of whom combined it very grossly with their former errors.

It seems probable that the book mentioned by Epiphanius, the Gospel of Eve, containing the wisdom which Eve learned from the Serpent, had its origin among certain reputed heretics, who, according to Origen, were not Christians. They were called *Ophians* or *Ophites* (we might render the name *Serpentists*), from the Greek word *ὄφις*, *a serpent*; because, as Origen says, they took the part of the Serpent who seduced Eve, and represented him as having given good counsel to our first parents.* Irenæus, in one of the last chapters of his first book,† before referred to,‡ gives an account of the doctrines of a certain sect not named by him, but which, as is evident from a comparison with Origen and other subsequent writers, was that of the Ophians. Nothing entitled to much credit is added by the later historians of the heretics to the notices of Irenæus and Origen.

Origen's mention of them is incidental. There is no reason to distrust its essential correctness, but he enters into no general exposition of their system. The account of Irenæus is confused and improbable, and appears to have been put together from imperfect and inconsistent sources of in-

* Origen. cont. Celsum. Lib. vi. § 28. Opp. i. pp. 651, 652.

† Cap. 30.

‡ See p. 128.

formation. The statements respecting them by him and by the other writers who speak of them as heretics, as the author of the Addition to Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Theodoret, when taken in connection, present a system of absurdities so palpably irreconcilable, that no sect could have professed it for their creed. We may compare it to a machine composed of parts of various others, interfering among themselves in such a manner, that evidently it could never have been in operation.

We can therefore admit, with any confidence, only some very general conclusions respecting the doctrines of the Ophians.* Whether Christians or not, they appear to have been of the class of theosophic Gnostics, holding very disparaging opinions of the Creator, whom they regarded as the god of the Jews. They believed that he, with six other powers produced by him, informed and ruled seven spheres surrounding the earth (those of the sun and of the planets known to the ancients); and that through these spheres the soul had to pass after death in its ascent to the Spiritual World. The way, which might otherwise be barred by those powers, was open to such as were initiated in their mysteries, and had learned the proper invocations which the soul must address to them in its ascent, to obtain its passage. Their doctrines have the appearance of being a caricature of the doctrines of the proper Gnostics. Maintaining the common opinion that the Creator was *not spiritual*, and regarding him as being opposed to the manifestation and developement of the spiritual principle in man, they honored the Serpent for having thwarted his narrow purposes, withdrawn our first parents from their allegiance to him, induced them to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and thus brought them the knowledge of "that Power which is over All." By a serpent the Phœnicians and Egyptians are said to have symbolized the Agathodæ-

* See the account of Irenæus, as before referred to, Lib. i. c. 30; and that of Origen in his work, Against Celsus, Lib. vi. Opp. i. pp. 648-661. Lib. vii. pp. 722, 723. Lib. iii. p. 455.

mon, the benevolent power in nature (the god Cneph of the Egyptians) ;* and the Ophians, perhaps, regarded the Serpent under the same aspect. Clement of Alexandria once incidentally mentions the Ophians, in speaking of the origin of the names of different sects. Some, he says, are denominated "from their systems and from the objects they honor, as the Cainists and the Ophians."† The Cainists or Cainites (whom we shall have occasion to notice hereafter) are represented as magnifying Cain. The Ophians honored the Serpent.

Nothing concerning the Ophians would seem to be better established than this fact. But it is not stated by Irenæus. On the contrary, according to his account of their system, the Serpent was originally vicious, produced by the Creator in the dregs of matter, and treacherous to him. Afterwards, indeed, he appears employed by *Sophia* or Wisdom, the offspring of the Unknown God, the mother, but adversary of the Creator, for the purpose of seducing our first parents to eat of the forbidden fruit ; by which they obtained a knowledge of the Supreme Divinity. But the Creator, who was himself desirous of being regarded as the highest God, being in consequence angry with the Serpent, expelled him from heaven, where he had before dwelt, and cast him down to earth. After this fall he is made to correspond to the serpent of the Apocalypse, the Devil ; and is represented as producing six other evil Powers (answering to the six subordinate Powers of the Creator), and as being, together with them, full of malice equally toward men and their Maker.

But we have good reason to believe that Irenæus, our earliest, and one of our two principal authorities, has fallen into great errors respecting the system of the Ophians, when we find him saying, notwithstanding what has been stated, that they affirmed the Serpent to be "the *Nous* (Intellect) himself;"‡ for this was the name by which theosophic Gnostics

* Eusebii Præparatio Evangelica, Lib. i. c. 10.

† Stromat. vii. § 17. p. 900.

‡ Lib. i. c. 30. § 5. p. 110.

designated their first emanation from the Supreme Being. Elsewhere he says, that some of the Ophians maintained, that Wisdom herself became the Serpent.* And in connection with this we cannot but be struck with the intrinsic improbability of the scheme that he ascribes to the sect; according to which the Devil was employed for the purpose of communicating spiritual wisdom and a knowledge of the true God to our first parents. These, however, are but some of the inconsistencies that present themselves in the system that he has depicted.

That the Ophians held the Serpent in honor appears from the testimony of Clement and Origen, the indications furnished by Irenæus himself, the reports of later writers, and the evidence of their distinguishing name. Epiphanius says, that they glorified the Serpent as God, or as a god, and affirmed him to be Christ;† though, at the same time, with the grossest inconsistency, of which he seems to have had some indistinct consciousness, he gives a mutilated variation of the account of Irenæus by which the Serpent is identified with the Devil.‡ The same inconsistency exists in the relation of the author of the Addition to Tertullian, who follows Irenæus in part, but affirms that the Ophians placed the Serpent above Christ.§ And Theodoret, who, I think, was embarrassed by the contradictions of his predecessors, says, that *some* of the Ophians worshipped the Serpent.||

Modern writers have, in consequence, conjectured either that there were two sorts of Ophians, or that there were two Serpents in their system, one celestial and the other terrestrial. But it would have been strange, if two classes of persons, one honoring the Serpent as a god, and the other regarding him as the Devil, had both been comprehended

* Lib. i. c. 30. § 15. p. 112.

† Indic. in Tom. iii. Lib. i. p. 229. Hæres. xxxvii. §§ 1, 2. pp. 268, 269. § 5. pp. 271, 272.

‡ Ibid. §§ 4, 5. pp. 271, 272.

§ Apud Tertullian. Opp. § 47. p. 220.

|| Hæret. Fab. Lib. i. n. 14. p. 205.

under the same name ; and as for the conjecture of two Serpents, it is certain that Irenæus, and the other ancient writers who mention the Ophians, speak only of one. A general solution of this and of other difficulties concerning them is to be found in the obscurity of the sect, in the consequent ignorance and inaccuracy of the reporters of their doctrines, and in the great probability that these doctrines were little settled among themselves.

Our purpose does not require us to enter further into the detail of their system, and to force our way through the crude accounts of ancient, and the hypotheses of modern, writers. The labor would in any case be unprofitable. It may be the duty of one exploring these difficult subjects to spend his own time in pursuing obscure paths, tangled with briars, till he is satisfied that they lead to nothing ; but it can seldom be worth while to conduct others over the same ground, that they may enjoy a like gratification.

The accounts of the Ophians belong, for the most part, to the fabulous history of the Gnostics. Nor should I have dwelt even so long upon this obscure and insignificant sect (for such we shall perceive it to have been), were it not for its having been magnified into importance by the discussions concerning it in modern times, and, still more, if it were not for the relation in which Origen says the Ophians stood to Christianity.

He speaks of them in his work against Celsus. Celsus had charged Christians with calling the Creator "an accursed god,"* upon the ground, as appears, that this was done by the Ophians ; for it was his custom to accuse Christians of the extravagances and errors of heretical and pseudo-Christian sects. But Origen says in reply, that the Ophians were so far from being Christians, that they spoke of Jesus not less reproachfully than did Celsus himself, that they admitted no one into their fellowship without pronouncing curses against

* Ὡς ἔρα Χριστιανοὶ λέγουσι κατηραμένον θεὸν τὸν δημιουργόν. Contra Cels. Lib. vi. § 28. Opp. i. 651.

him, and that they were unwilling to hear his name even as that of a wise and virtuous man.* Origen calls them a very obscure sect,† and speaks of their number as very small; there being, he says, none or very few remaining.‡ Celsus had brought forward a symbolical diagram, having reference to the ascent of the soul through the seven spheres of the Creator and his angels; and Origen is principally occupied by an account of this diagram, and the prayers inscribed upon it. It bore names given to the seven powers, barbarous to Grecian ears, borrowed partly from the Old Testament, and partly, according to Origen, from the art of magic.§ But he says that, though he had travelled much, and everywhere sought the acquaintance of men professing to know any thing, yet he had never met with any one who professed to explain it.||

In a passage antecedent to what I have quoted, Origen says, "Celsus seems to me to have become acquainted with some sects that have no fellowship with us even in the name of Jesus. Thus, perhaps, he has heard of the Ophians or the Cainites, or of some others, holding doctrines wholly foreign from those of Jesus."¶

Origen's account of the insignificance of the sect of the Ophians is confirmed, if it need confirmation, by the facts, that they are not *named* by Irenæus, nor are their peculiar doctrines referred to in his long confutation of different heresies, which forms the greater part of his work; that they are but once incidentally mentioned, as we have seen, by Clement of Alexandria; and that they are not noticed at all by Tertullian. Their want of notoriety appears likewise from the uncertainty respecting their name. None is given them by Irenæus. By Clement and Origen they are called Ophians (Οφιανοὶ); by Epiphanius, and some Latin writers who mention

* Cont. Cels. Lib. vi. § 28. p. 652.

† Ibid. § 24. p. 648.

‡ Ibid. § 26. p. 650.

§ Ibid. § 32. pp. 656, 657.

|| Οὐδενὶ γοῦν περιτετεύχαμεν πρεσβεύοντι τὰ τοῦ διαγράμματος. Ibid. § 24. p. 648.

¶ Cont. Cels. Lib. iii. § 13. p. 455.

them, Ophites (*Oφῖται*). Theodoret speaks of them as "Sethians, or Ophians, or Ophites;"* but Epiphanius and others make quite a distinct sect of the Sethians,† and the probability is, that no proper sect ever existed under this name.‡ The obscurity of the Ophians is made still more evident by the very confused and inconsistent accounts of their doctrines, accounts such as would not have been given of those of any well-known sect.§

There is, as we have seen, a disagreement between Origen on the one side, and Irenæus and subsequent writers on the other, concerning the relation in which the Ophians stood to Christianity. Irenæus represents them as Christian heretics, Origen as an antichristian sect. The difference would have been of no account, if Origen had merely said, that they were not Christians. According to Irenæus, they held that their doctrines were not openly taught by Christ, but that Jesus, whom they distinguished from Christ, remaining on earth eighteen months after his resurrection, then communicated them to a few of his disciples, who had capacity for such great

* Hæret. Fab. Lib. i. n. 14. p. 204.

† They are the thirty-ninth Heresy of Epiphanius. Opp. i. 284.

‡ The Sethians have been mentioned before (p. 18, note †). I conceive, that "Sethians" was, as there explained, only a name by which some of the Gnostics denoted *the spiritual*; Seth being regarded as their progenitor or prototype. Thus, in the *Doctrina Orientalis* (n. 54. p. 982), it is said, that "from Adam are produced three natures; the first irrational, of which was Cain; the second rational and righteous, of which was Abel; and the third spiritual, of which was Seth;" and Seth is then represented as producing a spiritual offspring, "whose citizenship is in heaven, and whom this world cannot contain." Irenæus gives a similar account of the opinions of the Valentinians concerning the division of men into three kinds, corresponding to Cain, Abel, and Seth. (Lib. i. c. 7. § 5. p. 35.)

§ Yet Matter, in his *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme* (ii. 260), states, in direct contradiction to all evidence and probability, that "the Ophites were equally celebrated and numerous;" and (p. 184) that, being "familiar with the doctrines of ancient Egypt, and those of the ancient East, as well as with Judaism and Christianity, they undertook to do justice to all the truth contained in these systems; they availed themselves of their myths, their symbols, and their teachings, and at the same time regarded all these doctrines, which were insufficient for them, as

mysteries.* Thus founding a system of their own invention on a supposititious basis, they might well be considered as not Christians. But Origen says, that they pronounced curses against Jesus. With so slight a hold as they had upon Christianity, and probably with no very fixed belief, they may have passed through a natural process of deterioration during the interval between Irenæus and Origen. There is nothing improbable in the supposition, that a vain and foolish sect should first claim to be a sort of transcendental Christians, and then, finding themselves contemned by the great body of believers, and perceiving that their speculations were only embarrassed by their pretended faith, should have determined to rely on their own spiritual wisdom alone, and should have openly professed their rejection of Christianity with something of the spleen of apostates.

This is an obvious solution of the disagreement between Origen and Irenæus. But perhaps we are to look still further for an explanation of it. With more or less analogy to other later sects, the theosophic Gnostics believed that they were guided to the truth by the divine light within, that spiritual nature which they considered as peculiar to themselves. Their systems consequently were the truth. They were derived from a higher source than reasoning, and were not amenable to it. They could be judged of only by those whose spiritual apprehensions were conformed to their reception. These principles, it is true, were not consistently acted upon. The Gnostics appear to have reasoned as well as they were able; and, as we shall hereafter see, were even reputed in their day subtile reasoners from the Scriptures. The claim of a higher internal source of knowledge, of the nature

subordinate to the authority of a superior science, revealed to them through a more pure and direct communication with the world of intelligences."

I have quoted the work of Matter once before, and shall have occasion to quote it once again. It may not be wholly useless to give a few specimens of the manner in which the subject of the Gnostics has been treated, and of what have been presented as the last results of the inquiries respecting it.

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 30. § 14. p. 112.

and operations of which reason is not the judge, is commonly resorted to only when all other modes of proof fail. Men do not condemn the aid of reason before it is withdrawn. But it was the tendency of the self-confident state of mind which characterised the Gnostics, to lead them to reject instruction from without. A true Gnostic was his own teacher; and though he found his system in the Gospel, yet his own mind was the book in which it was first read. Christianity was likely thus to become, in his view, an abstraction, the name for a body of opinions and imaginations, which he had embraced because he knew them to be true, independently of what others regarded as evidence of the divine authority of our religion. To him, indeed, its evidence might be merely its conformity to the revelations of his own spiritual nature; and from such a state of mind the transition was easy to the proper infidelity ascribed to the Ophians.

Together with this, the theosophic Gnostics, generally, distinguished between the being who appeared as a man, Jesus, the son of the Creator, and the celestial being, Christ, or the Saviour, or the spiritual Jesus, who at the baptism of the former descended into him from the Pleroma.* To use the words of Tertullian, they "made Christ and Jesus different beings, the one had escaped from the midst of multitudes, the other was apprehended; the one in the solitude of a mountain, overshadowed by a cloud, had been resplendent before three witnesses, the other, with no mark of distinction, had held common intercourse with men; the one was magnanimous, but the other trembling; and, at last, the one had been crucified, the other had risen." † It was the Christ of the Pleroma whom they regarded as the teacher of divine truth; and those truths which were most mysterious and transcendent they conceived him to have taught in secret meanings, and enigmas, and in mere intimations and allusions,

* Irenæus. Lib. i. c. 7. § 2. pp. 32, 33. Lib. iii. c. 10. § 4. p. 186. Ibid. c. 11. § 1. § 3. pp. 188, 189. Conf. Lib. i. c. 2. § 6. pp. 12, 13.

† De Carne Christi, c. 24. p. 325.

recorded in the Gospels, and in private unrecorded discourses addressed only to those capable of comprehending them. But the system of the Ophians appears throughout as a coarse exaggeration of the doctrines of the theosophic Gnostics. In common with those Gnostics, they regarded Jesus as the son of the Creator. But of the Creator they gave the most disparaging representations, and are said to have pronounced him accursed. It is not, then, difficult to believe, that they extended like enmity to his son; nor is there any thing very improbable in supposing, that they might have pretended to be, in some sort, followers of Christ, while they rejected Jesus as a divine teacher, and even proceeded to the extravagance mentioned by Origen, of pronouncing curses on his name.* Thus in our own day, among the theologians of Germany, we may find speculations concerning an abstract, an ideal, or a symbolical Christ, who is an object of faith, while the history of Jesus is regarded as fabulous.

From what has been said it may appear, that sects and individuals who are not to be considered as Christians have been erroneously reckoned among the Gnostics. Nor is their existence difficult to be accounted for. Christianity soon became an object of universal attention. It was a new phenomenon in the intellectual world. A power, unknown before, was in action, and spreading its influence far beyond the sphere to which it might seem to be confined. Our religion essentially affected the heathen philosophy contemporary with it, and introduced into it conceptions such as had not been previously entertained. The doctrines of our faith

* This solution of the disagreement between Origen and Irenæus implies the incorrectness of the account of the latter writer (already quoted, p. 140), that the Ophians affirmed that *Jesus* after his resurrection taught, for eighteen months, the mysteries of their doctrines to those who were capable of receiving them. But, beside the contradiction to Origen, the whole account of Irenæus (Lib. i. c. 30. §§ 12, 13, 14. pp. 111, 112) respecting the agency of *Christ* and of *Jesus* in the system of the Ophians is too obscure and incongruous to be entitled to much consideration.

were, undoubtedly, more or less known to many, who had not studied them in the Gospels, nor were acquainted with its evidences as a revelation from God. Though not received by such as of divine authority, and but imperfectly understood, they gave a new impulse to thought. Men's minds were thrown into a state of effervescence, new affinities operated, and new combinations of opinion were formed. There were, doubtless, those whose vanity prompted them to profess an acquaintance with the new barbaric philosophy, as they deemed it, and to represent themselves as having exercised a critical and discriminating judgment upon it, and as having discovered in it certain important views, and certain truths not before developed. In some of those affected by our religion, their imperfect and heartless knowledge of it would be rather destructive than renovating, breaking down all barriers of thought, and opening the way for wild speculations. Hence, as we may easily believe, new systems of opinion sprung up, not Christian, but deriving some characteristic peculiarities from Christianity;—the systems held by those whom we have called pseudo-Christians.

But how, it may be asked, came the pseudo-Christians to be confounded with Christian heretics? Various considerations afford an answer to this question. As I have remarked, no well-defined boundary was apparent between the two classes. They passed insensibly into each other. In the reliance of the Gnostics upon the revelations of their own spiritual nature we may perceive a tendency to infidelity. It was an error which would lead many to undervalue, and some to reject, the authority of Christ. The pseudo-Christians were reckoned among the Gnostics, because many of them held Gnostic opinions; and such opinions were attributed even to those, the Carpocratians, by whom they were not held. Another cause of this confusion may be found in the fact, that the Heathens would naturally blend together in one general class all those who, breaking away from the old

forms of philosophy, were evidently involved in the new movement in the intellectual world, produced by Christianity. The enemies of our religion charged upon Christians what might be truly or falsely said of such sectaries as we have been considering. And, on the other hand, the catholic Christians regarding the Gnostics as not true believers, as not belonging to the Christian body, were not careful to discriminate between them and those who, though corresponding with them in many respects, had yet no title to the Christian name. Hence it was, we may conceive, that the Gnostics were classed with individuals, whose doctrines and whose lives many of them regarded with as strong disapprobation as did the catholic Christians.

In the preceding chapters we have taken a general view of the Gnostics and of their relation to the catholic Christians. We have traced their external history, and attended to the respective characters of those writers from whom our knowledge of them is derived. We have considered their morals, —an essential point in determining how far they may be regarded as sincere though erroneous believers; and we have discriminated them from sectaries with whom they have been confounded, who, though borrowing some conceptions from Christianity, were not Christians.

It has been suggested, likewise, that the occasion of Gnosticism was to be found in the aversion of the Gentiles to Judaism, in the form in which it was presented to their minds; and to this subject we will next attend.

CHAPTER V.

ON GNOSTICISM, CONSIDERED AS A SEPARATION OF JUDAISM
FROM CHRISTIANITY.

“EVERY heretic, as far as I know,” says Tertullian, “ridicules the whole of the Old Testament.”* “To separate the Law from the Gospel,” he observes in another place, “is the special and principal object of Marcion.”† “The labor of the heretics,” he says, “is not in building up an edifice of their own, but in destroying the truth. They undermine ours to erect their own. Take away from them the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Creator God, and they will have nothing to urge against us.”‡ “It is the case with all those,” says Irenæus, “who hold pernicious doctrines, that, being influenced by the opinion, that the Law of Moses is different from and contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, they have not turned to consider the causes of the difference between the two Testaments.”§

Origen, in maintaining the necessity of interpreting the Scriptures allegorically, says, that many have fallen into great errors from not understanding them in their spiritual sense. He first instances the unbelieving Jews, who, he says, rejected the Messiah in consequence of interpreting the prophecies concerning him literally. He then proceeds thus; “The heretics too, when they read, *A fire has blazed from my wrath; ||—I am a jealous God, requiting the sins of fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation; ¶—I repent that I have anointed Saul to be King; **—I am the*

* Advers. Marcion. Lib. v. c. 5. p. 467.

† Ibid. Lib. i. c. 19. p. 374.

‡ De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, c. 42. p. 217.

§ Cont. Hæres. Lib. iii. c. 12. § 12. p. 198.

|| Jeremiah xv. 14.

¶ Exodus xx. 5.

** 1 Samuel xv. 11.

God who makes peace and creates evil; *—and, in another place, *There is no evil in a city which the Lord hath not wrought*; †—and yet further, *Evil came down from the Lord to the gates of Jerusalem*; ‡—and, *An evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul*; §—when they read these and ten thousand other similar passages, they do not indeed venture to reject the divine origin of the Scriptures [the Jewish Scriptures], but they believe them to have proceeded from the Creator whom the Jews worship. Regarding him, in consequence, as imperfect and not good, they think that the Saviour came to make known the more perfect God, who, they affirm, is not the Creator. Holding various opinions concerning this subject, and having deserted the Creator, who is the unoriginated only God, they have given themselves up to their own fabrications; and have formed mythological systems, according to which they explain the production of things visible, and of other invisible things, the existence of which they have imagined. But indeed,” continues Origen, “the more simple of those who boast that they belong to the church, who regard none as superior to the Creator, and in this do well, have yet such conceptions of him, as are not to be entertained of the most cruel and most unjust of men,”—in consequence, as he immediately remarks, of their understanding the Jewish Scriptures not “according to their spiritual sense, but according to the naked letter.” ||

“The most ungodly and irreligious among the heretics,” says Origen in his Commentary on Leviticus, “not understanding the difference between *visible* Judaism and *intelligible* Judaism, that is, between Judaism in its outward form and Judaism in its hidden purport, have at once separated themselves from Judaism, and from the God who gave these Scriptures and the whole Law, and have fabricated for

* Isaiah xlv. 7.

† Amos iii. 6, so quoted by Origen.

‡ Micah i. 12. § 1 Samuel xvi. 14.

|| De Principiis, Lib. iv. § 8. Opp. i. 164, seqq.

themselves another God, beside him who gave the Law and the Prophets, and made heaven and earth." *

Of the opinions of Ptolemy, the Valentinian, respecting the Jewish Law, we have a detailed account in his letter to Flora, which he seems to have intended as a sort of introduction to Gnosticism,—as an exposition and defence of its fundamental doctrine. He begins by stating, that some believe the Law to have been ordained by God the Father, and others by the Adversary, Satan. Both opinions he rejects as altogether erroneous. It could not have proceeded from the Perfect God and Father; because it is imperfect, and contains commands unsuitable to the nature and will of such a God; nor, on the other hand, can the Law, which forbids iniquity, be ascribed to the Evil Being. His own opinion, he conceives, may be proved by the words of Christ, to which alone he says we may safely trust in investigating the subject. It is, that the Law contained in the Pentateuch does not proceed from a single lawgiver, consequently not from the god of the Jews alone. A part of it is to be ascribed to him; another part was given by Moses on his own authority; and a third portion consists of laws interpolated by the Elders of the people. In proof that some laws proceeded from Moses alone, he quotes the words of Christ; "*Moses on account of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives; but in the beginning it was not so, for God established the connection, and what the Lord has joined together, let no man put asunder.*"† To the laws interpolated by the Elders, he regards Christ as referring, when he taught the Jews, that they had set aside the Law of God by the traditions of their Elders.‡ Of that portion of the Law which he ascribes to the god of the Jews, some of the precepts, according to him, are wholly unmixed with evil. They constitute the Law properly so called, that Law which the Saviour came not to destroy but

* Philocalia, c. 1. ad finem. Opp. ii. 192.

† Matth. xix. 4-8.

‡ Mark vii. 3-9.

to perfect. They are those of the Decalogue.* Other precepts have a mixture of something bad and wrong, and were abrogated by the Saviour. Such for instance is the law respecting retaliation, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." A third class, consisting of the ceremonial law, relates to things typical of those to come, more spiritual and excellent, in the Christian dispensation. Why the laws of the god of the Jews should contain types of Christianity, Ptolemy does not explain in this Letter. He probably accounted for it through a secret influence from the Pleroma, under which, as we shall hereafter see, the Creator was represented by the Valentinians as acting.

Ptolemy next proceeds to answer the inquiry, Who was that god who gave the Law? He was not, he repeats, the Perfect God, nor was he Satan; but he was the Fashioner and Maker of this World, and of the beings contained in it, not good (that is, not possessing unmingled goodness), like the Supreme God, nor evil and wicked like Satan; but standing in the midst between them, one who may properly be called Just, as one who rewards and punishes according to his measure of goodness; not unoriginated like the Supreme God, but being an image of him.

In this account of his opinions, Ptolemy probably gives as favorable a view as was entertained by any Gnostic of the Jewish Law, and of the god of the Jews.

It is to be observed, that the Gnostics did not reject the Pentateuch, and the other books of the Old Testament, as unworthy of credit. On the contrary, their system was founded on the supposition, that those books contained a

* There is here, apparently, an example of that inconsistency of which we find so much in the theological speculations of the ancients. Christ, according to Ptolemy, retained and perfected "the ten commandments." But Ptolemy believed these to have been given, not by the Supreme Being, but by the god of the Jews. Now the first of them is, "Thou shalt have no other God beside me;" a command which, according to his system, it is impossible that Christ should have confirmed, since Ptolemy regarded him as having come to reveal another and far greater God than the god of the Jews.

correct account of the Jewish dispensation, and of the events connected with it. Difficulties and objections then pressed upon them. There was much that offended their reason, their moral sentiments, and their prejudices as Gentiles. Receiving the history as true, and understanding it in its obvious sense, they could not believe that the god of the Jews was the same being as the God of Christians. Thus they were led to separate the Law from the Gospel, and to introduce the agency of another being, wholly distinct from the Supreme God, in the government of the world. The corner-stone of Gnosticism was thus laid.

But in regarding many of the representations given of God in the Old Testament as unworthy of the Supreme Being, the Gnostics did not stand alone. The more intelligent of the catholic Christians contemporary with them strongly felt and expressed these and other objections to which the Old Testament was, in their view, exposed, if understood in its obvious sense. This feeling is shown in the quotations before given from Origen, and the subject well deserves further consideration; for there are few of more importance in the history of Christian opinions.

In a Note to this volume* there is some notice of the opinions of the author of the Clementine Homilies concerning the Old Testament. A great part of that work is directed against the doctrines of the Gnostics, represented as maintained by Simon Magus. There is much relating to the objections to the god of the Jews, (that is, in the view of the writer, to the Supreme God,) which the Gnostics derived from the Old Testament; and of these objections the author, under the person of Peter, presents a bold solution. He gives up at once to reprobation the passages on which they were founded, maintaining that they are false representations of God. He represents them as existing in the Jewish Scrip-

* See Additional Note, B.

tures, through the permitted agency of Satan, to serve as a test for distinguishing between those who are, and those who are not, willing to believe evil concerning God.* According to him, what in those Scriptures is accordant with right conceptions of God is to be received as true, and what is not so is to be rejected as false.† His general notions concerning them appear in the following passage. "There are some," he says, referring to some among the Jews, "who, receiving as true the unworthy and false representations of God in the Jewish Scriptures, understand not his essential divinity and might; but regarding him as ignorant, and rejoicing in slaughter, and remitting sins for the gift of sacrifices, and, still more, as deceiving, and speaking falsely, and committing every sort of injustice, maintain while they are committing sin, that they are leading religious lives, their actions being conformed to those of God." ‡

But in his view of the general character of the Old Testament, the author of the Homilies stood apart from the other Christian writers of the second and third centuries. They received its books from the Jews, and received them with the Jewish notions of their divine authority, and were therefore obliged to resort to modes different from those of the Gnostics, or the author of the Clementine Homilies, for solving the difficulties which they equally felt.

In the solution, that I shall first mention as resorted to by the catholic Christians, will be perceived that remarkable resemblance without coincidence, which often appears between their doctrines and those of the Gnostics. In comparing them together, we see sometimes, as in the present case, a striking likeness fashioned out of materials essentially different, while in other cases the material is the same, but moulded into a different form. In the solution of which I now speak,

* Homil. ii. §§ 38-52. iii. § 5.

† Ibid. ii. § 40, seqq. iii. § 42, seqq.

‡ Ibid. xviii. § 19.

the Logos of the catholic Christians takes the place of the Creator of the Gnostics, as the god of the Jews ; those representations of the Divinity in the Old Testament, which catholic Christians, equally with the Gnostics, regarded as incompatible with the character of the Supreme Being, being referred by them to the Logos.

In his Dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr says ; “ I will endeavour to prove to you from the Scriptures, that he who is said to have appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses, and is called God, is another god [that is, divine being], different from the God who created all things, another, I say, numerically, not in will, for I affirm that he never did any thing at any time, but what it was the will of him who created the world, and above whom there is no other God, that he should do and say.” *

Justin, among many other similar proofs, that there is another god beside the Supreme God, quotes those passages in which it is said, that God ascended from Abraham ; that God spoke to Moses ; that the Lord came down to see the tower of Babel which the sons of men had built ; and that God shut the door of the ark after Noah had entered. “ Do not suppose,” he says, “ that the unoriginated God either descended or ascended ; for the ineffable Father and Lord of All neither comes anywhere, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor arises ; but remains in his own place, wherever that may be.” After describing the greatness, omniscience, and omnipresence of the Supreme God, he proceeds ; “ How, then, can he speak to any one, or be seen by any one, or appear in a little portion of the earth, when the people could not behold on Sinai even the glory of him whom he sent.” “ Neither Abraham, therefore, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, ever saw the Father, the ineffable Lord of All, even of Christ himself ; but they saw him who, through the will of the Father, was a god, his Son, and likewise his angel, as ministering to his purposes.” †

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 252.

† Ibid. pp. 410, 411.

Tertullian regarded the Son, or the Logos, as having been the minister of God in creation and in all his subsequent works. To him he ascribes whatever actions are ascribed to God in the Old Testament. "He always descended to converse with men, from the time of Adam to that of the patriarchs and prophets." "He who was to assume a human body and soul was even then acquainted with human affections; asking Adam, as if ignorant, Where art thou, Adam? repenting of having made man, as if wanting prescience; putting Abraham to trial, as if ignorant of what was in man; offended and reconciled with the same individuals;—and so it is with regard to all which the heretics [the Gnostics] seize upon to object to the Creator, as unworthy of God, they being ignorant that those things were suitable to the Son, who was about to submit to human affections, to thirst, hunger, and tears, and even to be born and to die." "How can it be that God, the Omnipotent, the Invisible, whom *no man hath seen or can see*, who *dwells in light inaccessible*, walked in the evening in paradise, seeking Adam, and shut the door of the ark after Noah had entered, and cooled himself under an oak with Abraham, and called to Moses from a burning bush?" "These things would not be credible concerning the Son of God, if they were not written; perhaps they would not be credible concerning the Father, if they were." *

In his work against Marcion, Tertullian, after explaining various particular passages of the Old Testament objected to by him, says that he will give a summary answer to the rest. "I will give," are his words, "a simple and certain account of whatever else you have objected to the Creator, as mean, and weak, and unworthy. It is, that God could not have had intercourse with men, unless he had assumed the feelings and affections of humanity, by which he humbled and tempered to human infirmity the intolerable might of his majesty. Unworthy indeed it was in respect to himself, but necessary

* Advers. Praxeam, c. 16. pp. 509, 510.

for man ; and therefore became worthy of God, since nothing can be so worthy of God as the salvation of man." Marcion himself believed that God had manifested himself as Christ, and Tertullian proceeds, in language so foreign from what we are accustomed to, that it hardly admits of a literal translation ; " Why do you think that those humiliations [the facts in the Old Testament which Marcion so regarded] are unworthy of our God, seeing that they are more tolerable than the contumelies of the Jews, and the cross, and the tomb ? Are not those humiliations ground for concluding* that Christ, subjected as he was to the accidents of man, came from the same God whose assumption of humanity is made by you a matter of reproach ? For we further maintain, that Christ has always been the agent of the Father in his name, that it was he, who from the beginning was conversant with men, who had intercourse with the patriarchs and prophets ; being the son of the Creator, his Logos, whom he made his Son by producing him from himself, and then set him over all that he disposed and willed ; ' making him a little lower than the angels,' as was written by David. In thus being made lower than the angels he was prepared by the Father for those assumptions of humanity with which you find fault. He learnt from the beginning, being then already a man, what he was to be at last. It was he who descended, he who questioned, he who demanded, he who swore. But that the Father has been seen by none, the Gospel common to us both† bears witness, for in this Christ says ; ' No one has known the Father but the Son.' For he had pronounced in the Old Testament likewise, ' No one shall see God and live ;' thus determining that the Father is invisible, in whose name and by whose authority he who became visible as the Son of God was God." " Thus whatever you require as

* " An hæ sunt pusillitates quæ jam præjudicare debebunt," &c. For " An," we may read " An non," as the sense (about which there is no uncertainty) seems to require.

† That is, the Gospel of Luke as used by Marcion.

worthy of God will be found in the invisible Father, remote from human intercourse, calm, and, if I may so speak, the God of the philosophers; but whatever you censure as unworthy will be ascribed to the Son, who was seen, and heard, and had intercourse with men, who sees the Father and ministers to him, who unites in himself humanity and divinity, being in his powers divine, in his humiliation a man, that what he parts with from his divinity he may confer on man. All, in fine, that you regard as dishonorable to my God is the pledge of human salvation." *

In the passage just quoted, beside the doctrine, that the Logos, or Son, was the being represented as God in the Old Testament, and that to him actions might be ascribed which would be unsuitable to the Father, there appears another conception, which is often presented in the writings of Tertullian, and is employed by him elsewhere to answer the objections of the Gnostics to the Old Testament. It is, that, in both the Jewish and Christian dispensations, the means used by God to effect his purposes are such as in the view of man may appear unworthy, incongruous, and contemptible. He regards this as characteristic of the special manifestations of God. He grounds the conception particularly on a passage of St. Paul, which he frequently quotes or alludes to; "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put wise men to shame, and the weak things of the world God has chosen to put to shame the strong, and the mean things of the world, and the despised, has God chosen; and things that are nought, to do away what exist." † Tertullian, understanding this passage as he did, was able to reconcile himself to much that might otherwise have offended him in the Old Testament. "Nothing," he says, "ordained by God is truly mean, and ignoble, and contemptible, but only what proceeds from man. But many things in the Old Testament may be charged upon the Creator as foolish, and weak, and shameful, and little,

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. ii. c. 27. pp. 395, 396.* † 1 Corinthians, i. 27, 28.

and contemptible. What more foolish, what more weak, than the exaction by God of bloody sacrifices and sweet-smelling holocausts? What more weak than the cleansing of cups and beds? What more shameful than to inflict a new blemish on the ruddy flesh of an infant? What so mean as the law of retaliation? What so contemptible as the prohibition of certain kinds of food? Every heretic, as far as I know, ridicules the whole of the Old Testament. For God chose the foolish things of the world to confound its wisdom." *

It is to be observed, however, that Tertullian had, in a former part of his work,† ably defended the reasonableness of all the requisitions of the Law of which he here speaks, except circumcision; and that the defence of the Old Testament in its literal or obvious sense was not neglected by other fathers.

But, in connection with those that have been mentioned, another solution was found for its difficulties in the supposition of a hidden or allegorical sense. This imaginary sense was believed not to be expressed by the words in their direct meaning, but to be one, of which the direct meaning presented an allegory, a type, a symbolical representation, or an enigmatical expression. The allegorical mode of interpretation was unsupported by any tenable reasoning, it proceeded on no settled principles, it had no definite limits in its application, there was not, even professedly, any test of its correctness, nor generally does there appear to have been a distinct apprehension that the meaning educed by it was intended by the writer to whose words it was ascribed.‡ The subject

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. v. c. 5. p. 467.*

† *Ibid. Lib. ii. c. 18, seqq.*

‡ The following may serve as a specimen of allegorical interpretation. In Exodus, xv. 23-27, it is related that the Israelites, after crossing the Red Sea, came to the waters of Marah, which were so bitter that they could not drink them; but that the Lord showed Moses a tree, which when he cast into the water, it became sweet; and that afterwards the Israelites arrived at Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees.

"It is very strange," says Origen, "that God should show Moses a tree to cast into the water, to make it sweet. Could he not make the water sweet without a

was still further confused by the circumstance that the term "to allegorize" was applied to the use of simply figurative language, of which the true meaning was sufficiently obvious; and such language, in consequence, was confounded with that to which an imaginary mystical sense was assigned. Thus Clement of Alexandria in remarking on the words of our Saviour; "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep," speaks of Christ as by *sheep* expressing *allegorically* a flock of men.* As to Origen, though it is not probable that he had ever so stated the subject to his own mind, yet his customary modes of speaking in relation to it imply that all interpreta-

tree? But let us see what beauty there is in the inner sense." He accordingly explains, that, allegorically understood, the bitter waters of Marah denote the Jewish Law, which in its literal purport is bitter enough; so that of its bitterness the true people of God cannot drink. "What then is the tree which God showed to Moses? Solomon teaches us, when he says of Wisdom, that *she is a tree of life to all who embrace her*. If, therefore, the tree of wisdom, Christ, be cast into the Law," and show us how it ought to be understood (I compress several clauses into these words), "then the water of Marah becomes sweet, and the bitterness of the letter of the Law is changed into the sweetness of spiritual intelligence; and then the people of God can drink of it." Origen afterwards remarks on the subsequent arrival of the Israelites at Elim with its twelve springs and seventy palm trees. "Do you think," he asks, "that any reason can be given why they were not first led to Elim?" "If we follow the history alone, it does not much edify us to know where they first went, and where they next went. But, if we search out the mystery hidden in these things, we find the order of faith. The people is first led to the letter of the Law, from which, while this retains its bitterness, it cannot depart. But when the Law is made sweet by the tree of life, and begins to be spiritually understood, then the people passes from the Old Testament to the New, and comes to the twelve fountains of the Apostles. In the same place, also, are found seventy palm trees. For not alone the twelve Apostles preached faith in Christ, but it is related that seventy others were sent to preach the word of God, through whom the world might acknowledge the palms of the victory of Christ." Homil. in Exod. vii. §§ 1, 3. Opp. ii. 151, 152.

Such is the style of interpretation which, intermixed with good sense, just remarks, and correct moral and religious sentiments, prevails throughout the expository works of Philo and Origen, and is frequent in the writings of many of the other fathers beside Origen: especially, as regards our present purpose, in those of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clement, and Tertullian.

* Εἰ δὲ ἡ ποιμνὴ ἡ ἀλληγορουμένη πρὸς τοῦ Κυρίου οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ ἀγέλη τις ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν, κ. τ. λ. Stromat. i. p. 421. The same use of ἀλληγορέω, or an equivalent term, may be found on p. 104. l. 17; p. 129. ll. 20, 29; p. 138. l. 5; p. 148. l. 5; p. 528. l. 21; p. 708. l. 11; p. 771. l. 23.

tion of Scripture which is not literal, is allegorical, and that there is no choice but of the one mode or the other.

The allegorical mode of interpretation thus affords a striking illustration of the indistinct conceptions and unsubstantial reasoning of the ancients. For we must not suppose that it was adopted by the fathers alone, or confined in its application to the Scriptures. It was prevalent in the age of which we speak. It had for a long time been applied by the heathen philosophers to the offensive fables of their mythology, the scandal of which they endeavoured to remove by representing them as symbolical representations of certain truths concerning the physical and moral world; a mode of explanation which with little good sense has been continued to our own day.* The revelations in the heathen mysteries probably consisted in great part of such interpretations of the heathen mythology. The philosophical Jews also had resorted to it in the exposition of the Old Testament; and, in applying it to the same book, the fathers only followed in the broad path which had been cleared by Philo. His explanations of the Old Testament are throughout allegorical. He had the same feeling, as the Christian fathers, of the objections to which it is liable if understood in its obvious sense, and of the supposed necessity of recurring to a hidden meaning. Thus, where speaking of the serpent which tempted Eve, and of the brazen serpent of Moses, he says; "These things as they are written are like prodigies and portents; but when allegorically explained, the fabulous immediately disappears, and the truth is manifestly discovered."† After quoting the words, "And God planted a garden in Eden," he says, that to understand this of his planting vines, or fruit trees of any kind, would be great and hardly curable folly. "We must have recourse to

* On this subject see (in the "Bibliothèque Choisie," T. vii. p. 88, seqq.) the remarks of Le Clerc, who in the compass of a few pages treats it with his customary clearness and judgment.

† Ταῦτα δ' οὕτω μὲν λεγόμενα φάσμασιν ἔοικε καὶ τέρασι. . . . Ἐν δὲ ταῖς δι' ὑπονοιῶν ἀποδόσεσι τὸ μὲν μυθῶδες ἐκποδὼν οἴχεται, τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ἀρίδηλον εὕρισκεται. De Agriculturâ. Opp. i. 315. Ed. Mangey.

allegory, the friend of clear-sighted men.”* Thus also in commenting on the passage, “Cain departed from the face of God,” he regards it as proving that what is written in the books of Moses is to be understood *tropologically* (that is, allegorically), the apparent meaning presented at first sight being far from the truth. “For if God have a face, and he who wills to leave him may easily remove elsewhere, why do we reject the impiety of the Epicureans, or the atheism of the Egyptians, or the mythological fables of which the world is full?”† Many similar passages occur in his writings.‡

Nor was the allegorical mode of understanding the Jewish Scriptures introduced by Philo. He celebrates the Therapeutæ, a sect among the Jews who devoted themselves to religious exercises and meditation, and of them he relates, that they occupied much of their time in the allegorical exposition of the sacred writings, regarding the literal meaning as symbolical of hidden senses, expressed enigmatically. He says, that they compared the whole Law to an animal, its body being the literal precepts, but its soul, the invisible sense lying treasured up in the words; and adds, that in their allegorical exposition they had for models the writings of ancient men, the founders of the sect.§ Elsewhere, Philo repeatedly refers to this mode of interpretation as common. “I have heard,” he says in one place, “another explanation from inspired men who consider most things in the Laws as visible and spoken symbols of the invisible and unspeakable.”|| The confidence with which, throughout his works, he proceeds on the system of allegorical exposition, without explaining or defending it, shows that it was well known and admitted. Its general prevalence is likewise made evident by the fact,

* De Plantatione Noe. Tom. i. p. 334.

† De Posteritate Caini. Tom. i. p. 226.

‡ As, for example, Legum Allegoriæ, Lib. ii. tom. i. p. 70. Lib. iii. p. 88. Quod Deterior Potiori insidiari soleat. Tom. i. pp. 194, 209, 223. De Posteritate Caini. Tom. i. pp. 232, 234, 235. Quod Deus sit immutabilis. Tom. i. p. 292, et alibi.

§ De Vitâ Contemplativâ. Tom. ii. p. 475. p. 483.

|| De Specialibus Legibus. Tom. ii. p. 329.

that it appears in quotations from the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament, particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Christian fathers, from the beginning, adopting the conceptions of their age, interpreted the Old Testament allegorically. Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho abounds in such expositions of it; but in a controversy with a Jew he was not called upon to defend it. He makes evident, however, his notions of its character, as requiring to be thus explained. After having represented the blood of the pass-over, with which the Israelites sprinkled their door-posts when the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed, and the scarlet line which the harlot Rahab hung out when Jericho was taken, as both intended for types of the blood of Christ, shed for the deliverance of men, he thus addresses Trypho: "But you, who explain these things in a low sense, impute much weakness to God, through understanding them so simply, and not inquiring into the true purport of what is said. For thus [that is, by understanding the Scriptures thus literally] even Moses may be judged a transgressor; since, after commanding that no likeness should be made of any thing either in heaven, or on the earth, or in the sea, he himself made a brazen serpent, and, setting it up for a sign, directed those who were bitten to look upon it; and by looking upon it they were saved. So the serpent, then, whom God cursed in the beginning, and destroyed, as Isaiah proclaims, with a great sword,* will be thought to have then saved the people; and thus we shall understand such things foolishly, like your teachers, and not as symbolical." †

Irenæus does not resort to allegorical interpretation in directly answering the objections of the Gnostics to the Old Testament. He defends it in its obvious meaning in much the same manner as modern divines have done. But, in maintaining its connection with Christianity, he represents it as full of types, shadowing forth in their hidden senses the

* Isaiah, xxvii. 1.

† Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 374, 375.

coming dispensation ; and in such hidden senses it appears that he himself was disposed to take refuge from the difficulties that pressed upon its obvious meaning. Thus he says ; ‘ One of the ancient presbyters relieved my mind by teaching me, that when the wrong actions of the patriarchs and prophets are simply related in the Scriptures without any censure, we ought not to become accusers (for we are not more observing than God, nor can we be above our master), but to look for a type. For no one of those actions which are mentioned thus uncensured in the Scriptures is without its purpose.”*

Tertullian does not dwell at length on the objections of the heretics to the Old Testament in any of his works except that against Marcion. Marcion rejected the allegorical mode of interpretation ;† and in reasoning with him Tertullian defends, and with ability, portions of the Jewish Law and history understood in their obvious sense, except so far as this sense was modified by his belief, before mentioned, concerning the agency of the Logos. But he abounds, at the same time, in allegorical expositions of the Old Testament, some of them exceedingly forced. He speaks of “the secret meanings of the Law, spiritual as it is, and prophetic, and full of figures in almost every part.”‡ And, in another place, he describes God, the God of the Old Testament, as “making foolish the wisdom of the world, choosing its foolish things and disposing them for man’s salvation ;” this being, he says, the hidden wisdom of which the apostle speaks, “which was in foolish, and little, and shameful things, which lay hid under figures, allegories, and enigmas, and was afterwards to be revealed in Christ.”§

Celsus, who lived in the second century, was acquainted

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. iv. c. 31. § 1. p. 268.

† Tertullian. Advers. Marcion. Lib. ii. c. 21. p. 392. Lib. iii. cc. 4, 5. pp. 398, 399. Origen. Comment. in Matth. Tom. xv. § 3. Opp. iii. 655. In Epist. ad Romanos, Lib. ii. Opp. iv. 494, 495.

‡ Advers. Marcion. Lib. ii. c. 19. p. 391.

§ Advers. Marcion. Lib. v. c. 6. p. 467.

with this manner of explaining and defending the Old Testament, and expressed himself vehemently against it. "He attacks the history of Moses," says Origen, "and finds fault with those who explain it tropologically and allegorically."* "He seems to me to have heard of writings containing the allegories of the Law, which, if he had read, he would not have said, 'The pretended allegories written concerning these fables are far more offensive and absurd than the fables themselves; for, with marvellous and altogether senseless folly, they bring together things which can in no way whatever be fitted to one another.' He seems," continues Origen, "to refer to the writings of Philo, or to others still more ancient, as those of Aristobulus."† But Origen did not mean to imply that Celsus, in his attack on the allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament, had not in view Christian allegorists as well as Jewish. He had a little before quoted from him a passage, in which Celsus, speaking of some of the narratives in Genesis and Exodus, says, that "the more rational of the Jews and Christians turn them into allegories. They take refuge in allegory because they are ashamed of them." In reply, Origen makes a strong retort upon the obscene fables of the mythology of the Pagans, which their philosophers represented as allegories.‡

The early fathers, in general, allegorized freely in their expositions of the Old Testament, and evidently regarded this mode of exposition as a means of removing objections to it. But no other of their number has recurred to this method so confidently as Origen;—of whom Jerome, before he began to regard his opinions as heretical, declared, that "none but an ignorant man would deny, that next after the Apostles he was the master of the churches."|| Origen, proceeding on the hypothesis of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures,

* Cont. Cels. Lib. i. § 17. Opp. i. 336.

† Ibid. Lib. iv. § 51. p. 542.

‡ Cont. Cels. § 48. p. 540; § 50. p. 542.

|| Præfat. in Lib. de Interpret. Nomin. Hebræor. Opp. ii. 3.

allegorized the New Testament as well as the Old, perceiving no other method of solving the great difficulties, which, on that hypothesis, often presented themselves to his mind in the verbal meaning of the Gospels and Epistles.* His notions of the Old Testament appear in the passages already quoted; but it may be worth while to adduce a few others.

“There are many of the laws of Moses,” he says, “which, as regards their literal observance, are absurd or impossible. It is absurd to forbid the eating of vultures,† a kind of food which none, however pressed by hunger, would resort to. An infant not circumcised on the eighth day, it is said, shall be cut off from the people.‡ Were any law, which was to be understood literally, required respecting this matter, it ought to have been, that the parents, or those who have the care of such an infant, should suffer death.”§ In one of his Homilies, speaking of the directions concerning the sin-offering in Leviticus,|| he says; “All this, as I have often before observed, when the passage was recited in the church, unless it be understood in a sense different from the literal, is more likely to be a stumbling-block in the way of Christianity and to overthrow it, than to be matter for exhortation and edification.”¶ Elsewhere, in treating of the distinction of clean and unclean food, after having allegorized the laws respecting it, he thus goes on; “If we say that the Great God promulgated laws to men which are to be *thus* understood, I think that they will appear worthy of the divine majesty. But if we cleave to the letter, and receive them as they are understood by the Jews, or as they are commonly understood, I should blush to affirm and profess that such laws were given by God. The laws of men, as those of the Romans, or of the Athenians, or of the Lacedæmonians, would seem more polished and reasonable. But if the law of

* See before, Vol. i. p. 116.

† Leviticus xi. 14. Deut. xiv. 13.

‡ Genesis xvii. 12, 14.

§ De Principiis, Lib. iv. § 17. Opp. i. p. 176. Origen treats at length of the subject of allegorical interpretation, in the work just referred to, p. 164, seqq.

|| Ch. vi. 24-30.

¶ Homil. in Leviticum, § 1. Opp. ii. 205.

God be understood, as is taught by the Church, then it evidently surpasses all human laws, and may truly be believed to be the Law of God.”* A few more passages will sufficiently illustrate Origen’s opinions on this subject. Speaking of different narratives in Exodus, he says, “These are not written to afford us instruction in history, nor is it to be supposed that the divine books relate the acts of the Egyptians; but what is written is written to afford us instruction in doctrine and morals.”† “We, who have learned to regard all that is written, not as containing narratives of ancient times, but as written for our discipline and use, perceive that what is here read takes place *now*, not only in this world, which is figuratively called Egypt, but in each one of ourselves.”‡ This mode of allegorizing Egypt into the world, and the inferior part of our nature, was, with much else of the same character, derived by Origen from Philo.§ In answering certain objections of Celsus, founded on the Old Testament, he has these words;|| “We say the Law is twofold, literal and allegorical, as others have taught before us. The literal has been pronounced, not so much by us as by God, speaking in one of the prophets, to consist of ordinances not good, and statutes not good;¶ but the allegorical, according to the same prophet, is said by God to consist of good ordinances and good statutes.** Certainly the prophet does not here [in speaking of the Law in the passages referred to] assert manifest contradictions. And conformably to this, St. Paul says, *The letter*, that is, the Law understood literally, *kills, but the spirit*, that is, the Law understood allegorically, *gives life.*”††

* Homil. in Leviticum vii. § 5. Opp. ii. 226.

† Homil. in Exod. i. § 5. Opp. ii. 131.

‡ Ibid. ii. § 1. Opp. ii. 133.

§ Vide Philon. de Migratione Abrahami, *passim*.

|| Cont. Cels. Lib. vii. § 20. Opp. i. 708.

¶ Ezekiel xx. 25.

** Ezekiel xx. 11.

†† 2 Cor. iii. 6.—This is a passage, which, from the time of Origen to the present day, has been often so quoted as to pervert its meaning The word

The allegorical or hidden meaning was divided into the moral and the mystical, or spiritual; the moral being supposed to relate to morality, and the mystical to the doctrines of religion. In remarking on the declaration of St. Paul; *The works of the flesh are apparent*,* Origen allegorizes the passage as referring to the literal sense of the Old Testament. This was figuratively called the carnal sense, being compared to the body in man, while the two branches of the allegorical, the moral and the mystical, or spiritual, were compared to the soul and to the spirit, according to the threefold division of man in ancient theology. "The history of the divine volumes," he says, "contains the works of the flesh, and is of little benefit to those who understand it as it is written." The examples of the Patriarchs, according to him, lead to dissoluteness. The sacrifices of the law, to idolatry, if the precepts concerning them are not supposed to have a further meaning than appears in the letter. "That the language of Scripture," he adds, "in its obvious sense, teaches hatred, is shown by this passage; *Wretched daughter of Babylon! Blessed be he who shall requite thee, as thou hast treated us. Blessed be he who shall take thy little ones, and dash them against the stones*: † and by this passage; *In the morning, I slew all the sinners of the land*.‡ And there are others of a similar kind, expressive of contention, rivalry, anger, strife, dissension; which vices, the examples set before us in the history, if we do not look to their higher meaning, are more likely to produce than to restrain. Heresies, likewise, owe their existence rather to understanding the Scriptures carnally [literally] than, as many think, to the works of the

γράμμα incorrectly translated "letter," means "what is written," "the written Law," "the Jewish Law." St. Paul says, that he was not a minister of that Law, but of "the spirit," or, in other words, of the spiritual blessings to be received through Christ; "for the written Law causes death [that is, to such as adhere to it in opposition to Christianity], but the spirit gives life." There is no reference to the distinction between the letter and the spirit of any particular writing.

* Galatians v. 19.

† Psalm cxxxvii. 8, 9.

‡ Psalm ci. 8.

flesh.” * The last sentence shows the liberality of Origen. From this, as well as from passages before cited,† we perceive what he thought the main occasion of the heresy of the Gnostics, and consequently what he regarded as its essential characteristic, that is to say, their doctrine concerning the Jewish dispensation. All the passages quoted from him prove, likewise, that he agreed with the Gnostics in regarding the opinions of the Jews respecting their Scriptures as untenable, if these Scriptures were to be understood only in their obvious meaning. But, if the metaphor may be allowed, he thought that their difficulties were to be solved in the menstruum of allegorical interpretation, and that the essential meaning might thus be obtained in crystalline purity.

Among the Gnostics, Marcion, as I have said, rejected the allegorical mode of interpretation. Other Gnostics, particularly the Valentinians, allegorized at least as extravagantly as the fathers ; but they were not disposed like them thus to do away the difficulties of the Jewish Scriptures. They, perhaps, felt more strongly the common dislike of the Gentiles to the Jews. They were not so ready to overcome the first unfavorable impressions which those books made upon their minds. Their faith as Christians was more imperfect ; it was more implicated with their philosophical speculations ; and they were not as solicitous as the catholic Christians to receive all which they supposed to be taught or implied in the New Testament. Their hypothesis respecting the Jewish dispensation, that it proceeded from an inferior divinity, was equally in accordance with the notions of the times, as the supposition that the books of the Jews were to be interpreted allegorically. By their theory,—by admitting the existence and acts of the God of the Jews, but denying him to be the Supreme Being,—they accounted, as they believed, for the

* Ex decimo Stromatum Origen. Lib. (Apud Hieronymi Comment. in Ep. ad Galat. Opp. iv. P. 1. coll. 294, 295.) Origenis Opp. Tom. i. p. 41.

† See pp. 145, 146.

otherwise inexplicable phenomena which those books presented ; while the catholic Christians thought themselves enabled to escape the force of the objections founded on those phenomena, by the allegorical mode of interpretation, and the other expedients to which they had recourse.

It may appear, then, that the principal occasion of the existence of the Gnostics, that is, of proper Christian Gnostics, was the impossibility, as it seemed to them, of regarding the God of the Old Testament and the God of Christians as the same being. It is true, that their systems, as we shall see, were intended to give an account of the evil in the world. But in having this object in view they did not differ from the catholic Christians, nor from heathen philosophers. What characterizes them, is their regarding the Jewish dispensation as an essential part of the evil and imperfection to be accounted for, and the character and agency which they consequently assigned in their systems to the God of the Jews. They were constituted a peculiar class by being Christians who separated Judaism from Christianity. In the controversy with their catholic opponents, the strength of their cause evidently lay in their objections to the Old Testament. These they appear to have been most ready to bring forward in defending their systems. In them they had a vantage-ground above their opponents, and could become assailants in their turn. Such was the state of opinion and feeling in the early age when the Gnostics were most numerous and respectable, that we might reasonably suppose that a considerable number of individuals would embrace Christianity with more or less imperfect faith, who would not extend their belief so far as to acknowledge Judaism also as a dispensation from God.

The belief of the catholic Christians in the divine origin of Judaism was a genuine consequence of their Christian faith. But with this belief, as if the one thing were necessarily connected with the other, they went on to adopt, likewise, the

opinions of the Jews concerning the divine authority of the books of the Old Testament. Those opinions were not indeed at once received by all Christians not Gnostics, as we have seen in the case of the author of the Clementine Homilies ; but they soon obtained general reception. The belief of the divine authority of the Jewish books was even extended by the catholic Christians to embrace many of those which constitute the Apocrypha of our modern Bibles.

There are few phenomena in the history of opinions more remarkable than this reception of the Jewish notions concerning the Old Testament by the generality of the early Christians. The Jews had been regarded with aversion by other nations. The unbelieving Jews continued to be so by the Gentile Christians ; and the believing Jews were an heretical sect in little repute. The books of the Old Testament, though accessible to every Greek and Roman scholar through the medium of the Greek translation of them, the Septuagint, had heretofore been treated with contemptuous neglect. The Gentile Christians, by whom they were received as of divine authority, were, with very few exceptions, wholly unacquainted with their original language, and obliged to recur for its meaning to copies of the Septuagint or of other translations, the correctness of which was denied by their opponents, the unbelieving Jews. At the same time, they had a strong feeling of the objections to which the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament are exposed, if understood in their obvious meaning, or, as they expressed it, in their *literal* sense ; and, notwithstanding the allegorical mode of interpretation, and the other expedients by which they escaped from these difficulties, they were reduced to straits, both in reconciling many passages to their own reason and moral sentiments, and in defending them against the attacks of Gnostics and unbelievers. Still they encumbered their cause, and gave great advantage to their opponents, by asserting the Jewish opinions concerning the character of those books,

in consequence of the belief, that the truth of Christianity implied not merely the fact of the divine mission of Moses, but the truth of those Jewish opinions. The scholars and philosophers,—for scholars and philosophers they were, notwithstanding any modern prejudices to the contrary,—who during the first three centuries appear as Christian fathers, received from the Jews, with whom as a people they had no friendly intercourse, all their canonical books; regarding them as of divine origin, and ascribing to them equal authority with the records of Christianity. It must have been a powerfully operative cause which produced this result. It strikingly evinces the strength of evidence that accompanied our religion. Its proofs must have been overwhelming, when, in addition to establishing an invincible faith in the religion itself, they occasioned, notwithstanding such obstacles, the adoption of the Jewish opinions respecting the Old Testament.

The fundamental difference, then, between the Gnostics and the catholic Christians, consisted in their different views of Judaism, and of the author of the Jewish dispensation. But, like other speculatists of their day, the Gnostics formed for themselves a system of the universe, in which, answerably to the declarations of the Old Testament, he whom they regarded as the god of the Jews appears as the Creator of the physical world. Such a system necessarily embraced some solution, or rather some account, of the evil that exists; and this, as we shall next see, was partly found in the supposed character of the Creator, and partly in the evil nature ascribed to matter.

The topics treated of in this Chapter naturally suggest the inquiry,—In what manner should the Jewish dispensation and the books of the Old Testament be regarded? The views that have been given of the opinions of the early Chris-

tians, both Catholics and Gnostics, involve the whole subject in doubts and difficulties, of which no rational solution is afforded. But the Jewish is intimately connected with the Christian dispensation, and one may, therefore, reasonably be unwilling to dismiss the inquiry without some attempt to answer it. I have accordingly considered the subject in an Additional Note to this volume.*

* See Additional Note, D.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SYSTEM OF THE Gnostics, AS INTENDED FOR A
SOLUTION OF THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL IN THE WORLD.

SECTION I.

*On their Opinion, that the World was formed by an inferior
Creator or Creators.* •

THE view which we are now about to take of Gnosticism will lead us to consider it as a complicated, but inartificial, and wholly unsatisfactory attempt to solve the problem of the existence of evil in the creation. "The same subjects," says Tertullian, "are agitated by the heretics and by the philosophers. They are entangled in the same discussions: Whence is evil and why does it exist? And Whence is man and how was he formed? and the allied question of Valentinus, Whence is God?"* By *God*, as here used in reference to the inquiry of Valentinus, is to be understood, not the Supreme Being, but the Maker of this world. In another passage, speaking of Marcion, he describes him as "diseased about the question, Whence is evil; as many," he adds, "especially the heretics, now are." He represents him as perverting the words of Christ, "A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit;" interpreting the former clause as referring to the Supreme Being, and the latter to the Maker of the World. "Having his perceptions blunted by the very extravagance of his curiosity, finding the declaration of the Creator, 'I create evil,' † and, having already presumed him to be the author of evil on the ground of those arguments which convince the ill-disposed, he has

* De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 7. p. 204.

† Isaiah xlv. 7.

taught, in conformity to this, that the Creator is signified by the bad tree bearing bad fruit, that is to say, the evils which exist ; and has presumed, that there must be another God, answering to the good tree bearing good fruit." *

By the introduction of Christianity a new impulse was given to the minds of men, Heathens as well as Christians, to investigate the origin of evil. The question, Whence is evil, is called by Eusebius " that famous subject of discussion among the heretics ;" † but the discussions concerning it were far from being confined to them.

Of this problem the solution peculiar to the Gnostics was twofold. In its most general form, as held by the principal sects, especially by the Valentinians and the Marcionites, it may be thus stated. They taught, on the one hand, that the Creator was an inferior and imperfect being, and, on the other, that evil was inherent in matter. Imperfection and evil, therefore, were the necessary result of the defects both of the workman and of the material.

We will first attend to their opinions respecting the Creator. By the theosophic Gnostics he was regarded, not as self-existent, but as deriving his being mediately from God. The Marcionites, perhaps, held the same opinion ; but we have no direct evidence that such was the fact. The Valentinians represented him as having been ignorant of the existence of the Supreme Being before it was discovered to him by the coming of Christ, and as having supposed himself to be the only God.‡ It is not improbable, that the Marcionites held a similar doctrine. The Valentinians believed that in the formation of beings he wrought, though unconsciously, by suggestions from the *Æon*, called *Saviour* or *Jesus* ; and to this *Æon* they ascribed such agency, that they regarded him

* Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 2. p. 366. Conf. Origen. De Principiis, Lib. ii. c. 5. § 4. Opp. i. 88.

† Hist. Eccles. Lib. v. c. 27.

‡ Irenæus, Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 5. § 4. p. 25. c. 7. § 4. p. 34 ; et alibi.

as having, in a certain sense, given form to all things without the Pleroma.* The Marcionites ascribed to the Creator no similar direction from a higher power. By the Valentinians he was regarded as benevolent, and as rejoicing in the interposition of the Supreme Being by Christ, through which both himself and his creatures were to be exalted and blessed. They believed him to be still continued in the government of the world, and intrusted with a certain care of the church.† They spoke of him as the God and Father of what is without the Pleroma, as an angel like to the Supreme God, and as formed in the image of the "Only Son," that is, of the first manifestation of the Deity.‡ The Basilidians appear to have held similar honorable conceptions of the Creator.§ But the Marcionites, though they allowed him to be just,|| represented him as a being to be feared rather than to be loved. They insisted more strongly than the theosophic Gnostics on the distinction, that he was "just," but not "good;" by which they meant, that he directly inflicted no evils on men except as penalties for sin, and conferred blessings as rewards for the performance of duty; but wanted the unmingled benevolence of the Supreme Being. Him they called good and not just, meaning, by denying him the latter attribute, that he inflicted no punishments. They proceeded still further in degrading the character of the Creator. They applied to him, as we have before seen, the words, "A bad tree produces bad fruit." From various passages of the Old Testament, correctly or incorrectly understood, they derived very unfavorable conceptions of him.¶ They believed that the

* Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 4. § 5. p. 22. c. 5. § 1. pp. 23, 24. c. 8. § 5. p. 42.

† Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 7. § 4. pp. 34, 35. c. 8. § 4. pp. 39, 40. Tertullian. Advers. Valentinianos, c. 28. p. 260.

‡ Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 5. §§ 1, 2. pp. 23, 24. Lib. iii. c. 12. § 12. p. 198. Clement. Al. Stromat. iv. § 13. p. 603. Ptolemæi Epist. ad Floram, p. 361.

§ Clement. Al. Stromat. ii. § 8. p. 449.

|| "Creator quem et Marcion justum facit." Tertullian. Advers. Marcion. Lib. iv. c. 33. p. 449.

¶ In the Dialogue *de Rectâ Fide* (Sect. ii. p. 826.), the speaker, representing a Marcionite, is made to say, that "the Good God came through compassion for

coming of Christ was intended for the deliverance of the spiritually minded from his reign, that they might be finally raised to a far higher state of glory than he could confer. But over all others they conceived that he still retained his authority, conferring rewards and punishments which extended to the future life. They regarded him as still the governor of this world (that is, of the material universe), and the peculiar god of the Jews, for whose redemption he was yet about to send *his* promised Messiah.*

Other opinions, still more derogatory to the Creator than those of the Marcionites, are reported to have been held by certain sects, heretical or pseudo-Christian. Those ascribed to the Ophians, the most remarkable among those sects, have

the soul of man, which he saw was under condemnation [that is, under condemnation from the Creator on account of sin ;] and that the Creator plotted against him, and determined to crucify him ; because he perceived that he was abrogating his laws." But the authority of the author of this Dialogue is not sufficient to establish the fact, that this doctrine was held by the earlier Marcionites concerning the Creator. Perhaps he may have had a ground for his representation in the language of some individual or individuals among those who called themselves Marcionites in the fourth century. Had the elder Marcionites held such a doctrine, Tertullian would have stated it expressly, and remarked upon it vehemently and at length ; nor would the other early fathers, none of whom mentions it, have left us in any doubt on the subject. The representation contained in the Dialogue has, however, been repeated by some modern writers, as by Beausobre (*Hist. du Manichéisme*, ii. 120), Mosheim (*Commentarii de Rebus Christ.* p. 407), and Walch (*Hist. der Kezereien*, i. 511).—Mosheim (*Ibid.* p. 384) ascribes the same doctrine to the Valentinians, which is a greater error ; for his statement is not only unsupported by any authority, but is directly contradictory to the testimony of the ancients, as it has been already alleged, pp. 171, 172.

A sentence of Tertullian (*Advers. Marcion. Lib. iii. c. 23. p. 411*) has been referred to, as countenancing what is said by the author of the Dialogue. But it falls far short of asserting what he has stated. Had Marcion directly charged the Creator with procuring the destruction of Christ, Tertullian, as I have said, would not have left us to *infer* the fact from an indirect allusion to it in a single sentence.

* Tertullian. *Advers. Marcion. Lib. iv. c. 6. p. 416.* Tertullian often elsewhere refers to the Doctrine of Marcion concerning a Jewish Messiah yet to come from the Creator ; as, *Lib. i. c. 15. p. 373. Lib. iii. c. 6. p. 399. c. 23. pp. 410, 411. Lib. v. cc. 8, 9. p. 471. c. 16. p. 481.*

been already mentioned. Ptolemy, in the beginning of his letter to Flora, says, that "some affirm that the Law of Moses was ordained by the opposing and destroying dæmon, to whom, likewise, they assign the formation of the world." Of individuals holding such opinions we nowhere else find any notice. It is not improbable that Ptolemy may have expressed himself very loosely, and have referred to such notions as were entertained, as we shall hereafter see, by at least one of the catholic fathers, Athenagoras, concerning the rule of Satan "over matter and the forms of matter," and may have brought them into connection with the doctrine of the Clementine Homilies, that a part of the Law proceeded from Satan,* and with that of the sectaries spoken of by Clement of Alexandria, who represented him as the author of the whole.† There is, however, no reason to doubt, that the opinions held by the Gnostics in General, and especially those of the Marcionites, led to extravagant and outrageous errors in some individuals. But how far any of those individuals had a title to be called Christians is uncertain. Their extravagances are a subject concerning which our information is very scanty and unsatisfactory. They attracted so little notice in their own time, that Clement of Alexandria tells us generally, that "there is no controversy, it is acknowledged by all, that the Creator is just."‡

We have seen what were the general conceptions of the Gnostics respecting the Creator. The theosophic Gnostics associated with him other powers, subordinate to him as agents in the government of the world. It is reported of some, as formerly mentioned, that they believed the world to have been made and governed by angels; but it is not improbable that this is a mere vague or incorrect account of a doctrine essentially the same with that of the Valentinians.§

* See p. 150.

† Pædagog. Lib. i. c. 8. p. 141.

‡ See p. 80.

§ See pp. 15, 16.

The theory of the Gnostics, in ascribing the creation and government of the world to an inferior being, is wholly foreign from our present belief. But it should not be brought into view, separate from all its connections, as something to be wondered at. It should be shown in its relations to the doctrines of their age, to the state of mankind then existing, and to the tendencies of human thought. One evident cause of its adoption appears in the Gnostic doctrines concerning the Jewish dispensation and the Old Testament. The Gnostics, admitting, in common with other Christians, that the Jewish dispensation proceeded from the Creator and Ruler of the visible world, and being at the same time unable to reconcile the representations given of him in the Old Testament with their conceptions of the Supreme Being, were led to the conclusion, that the Creator was an inferior god. But, in addition to this, their theory was in accordance with the philosophical speculations of their age. The current of opinion among the higher class of heathen philosophers set in the same direction. It was more or less coincident with doctrines that had been widely diffused, and which were adopted both by Jews and by catholic Christians. The supposition, that the Supreme Being had first directly interposed in human affairs, and had first made himself known to men, by his manifestation in Christ, agreed, in the view of the Gnostics, with the actual history of mankind, with the Character of the Christian dispensation, and with express declarations of Christ. And strange as their theory of an inferior Creator may appear to us, there has been a tendency to similar speculations even among intelligent Christians of modern times.

These are topics which deserve some attention ; and the first that may be remarked upon is the state of the popular and the philosophical religion in that portion of the heathen world, by which the Gnostics, as well as the catholic Christians, were surrounded.

In the popular religion of the Greeks and Romans there

was no recognition of God. Its heaven was a reflection of this earth. Its gods were formed after the model of human despots; clothed indeed with more than mortal beauty and might, but having the same passions, the same gross vices, the same caprice, the same favoritism, and the same vindictiveness. Among those who rejected the popular superstitions, some, as the Epicureans, the sect of the wealthy, the powerful, and the worldly, virtually rejected, at the same time, all religious belief. The Stoics, the most devout of the more ancient sects, ascribed supreme divinity to the universe itself, which they regarded as a living being, or rather, to the soul of the universe, the ethereal fire, which they supposed to pervade and animate it; but their piety consisted in their being devout polytheists, though not according to the gross conceptions of the vulgar. The ancient heathen philosophers, before the time of Christianity, regarded matter as uncreated; it was a common opinion that the world, or universe, was without beginning; and of those who recognised in it the agency of divine power, many conceived of this power as having been in eternal union with matter. The world, in their view, was one complex, ever-existent being. This doctrine might glimmer into a dim recognition of the personality of the divine principle, but it as commonly sunk into pantheism, and vague polytheistic notions of superintending divinities, and of mysterious laws and relations, operating independently of the will of any superior being. Aristotle says, that most of those who first philosophized or theologized, taught that matter was the only principle, or the first cause of all things that exist.* He himself conceived of God as a sort of all-powerful, incorporeal magnet, moving without volition the uncreated universe, a God, absorbed in contemplation, supremely happy in himself, but destitute of all moral attributes exercised toward other beings. Between such a God and mankind there could be no moral connection; and accordingly it has been observed that there is a general

* Metaphysic. Lib. i. c. 3.

absence of religious sentiment from his writings. We find a remarkable passage in Plato, in which he introduces Socrates, on the day of his death, as describing his former perplexity in studying the causes and nature of things, and then proceeding with his discourse thus : “ But on hearing one read from a certain book (as he said, of Anaxagoras), that it is mind which orders all things, and is their cause, I was pleased with this cause, and it seemed to me to be in some respects a satisfactory supposition, that mind is the cause of all things.”* This doctrine Plato thus represents as new to Socrates; whom he further describes as dissatisfied at finding that Anaxagoras, in the detail of his system, “ made,” as it is expressed, “ no use of mind ;” but, as if he had not introduced this principle, explained effects by material causes.† In the authentic exposition of the doctrines of Socrates given by Xenophon, the divine power and providence for which he contends are represented as residing in and exercised by the gods ; though there are expressions which imply that he had some presentiment of the one God. To these expressions there is, I think, nothing corresponding in the language of Xenophon himself throughout his works. Plato, on the other hand, with little reasoning on the subject, and without any definite and con-

* Phædo, p. 97.

† Ibid. p. 98.—With Anaxagoras, Socrates during the earlier part of his life was contemporary. How little agency he gave to mind in the formation of the universe may appear from what Diogenes Laertius says (Lib. ii. c. 3. § 4), that he taught that “ animals were first produced from moisture, heat, and earthy matter; and afterwards by generation.” He however is said to have been the first who represented mind as the disposer of matter in the ordering of the universe, and to have been celebrated on this account. (Diogenes Laert. ii. 3, 1. Cicero de Nat. Deorum. Lib. i. § 11.) Yet Thales, long before him, is also said to have introduced the agency of mind. But Thales belongs to the fabulous age of Grecian philosophy, and an opinion of later date was not improbably ascribed to him. The contradiction concerning the respective claims of Thales and Anaxagoras, which appears in the ancient accounts of Grecian philosophy, and especially in Cicero, where the two opposite propositions almost confront each other,—one that the agency of mind was first taught by Anaxagoras, and the other, that this agency had been taught by Thales,—may, perhaps, be explained by the little credit which was given to the latter account.

nected explanation of his meaning, has imaginations concerning the Deity, which excite our surprise and admiration, when we compare them with the common notions of other Grecian philosophers before Christianity. In his writings, in those of Cicero, and in the half-poetical conceptions of a few other men of a high order of intellect, we here and there discover, amid the general darkness of those times, glorious, but very partial and obscure, glimpses of God.

But what is particularly to be remarked, as analogous to the views of the Gnostics, is, that the partial recognition of the Divinity in the mind of a heathen philosopher did not lead to such conceptions of his universal and immediate agency, as Christianity has taught us to entertain. It was connected with the supposition, that the world was under the government of inferior gods. Plato was one of the most enlightened of heathen theists, the great theological philosopher of antiquity. But the Gnostic doctrine respecting the formation and government of the world by inferior agents may be traced back to his speculations. We find its germ in the cosmogony which he has left us in his "Timæus."

In this work, Plato represents the Supreme Ruler of All as giving birth to gods inferior to himself, celestial, animating the heavenly bodies and informing them with intelligence. Together with these, he speaks of the earth as the first and most ancient of the gods comprehended within the universe; and afterwards mentions the gods of the popular mythology, without clearly explaining his own opinion concerning them, but teaching that they are to be received as divine. He then describes the Supreme Being as thus addressing the newly-formed gods:—"Now learn what I shall teach you. Three kinds of mortal animals are yet unproduced.* Without the existence of these, the universe will be incomplete; for it will not contain every kind of living being: as it should do in order to be perfect. But if these beings were formed and

* The three kinds, as enumerated before by Plato (Timæus, pp. 39-40), are those which fly, those which dwell in the water, and those which walk the earth.

endued with life by me, they would equal the gods. To the end, therefore, that mortal beings may exist, and that the universe may be a complete whole, do you, according to your nature, take upon yourselves the creation of animals, imitating my power exercised in your production. And as to that part in those animals [the intellectual part], which it is fit should be of like name with the immortals, being called *divine*, and which will rule those among them who are willing to be obedient to justice and to you, I will furnish this seed and make a beginning. For the rest, do you weave together the mortal with the immortal part, and fashion and give birth to animals, providing them with food for their increase, and receiving them again when they perish."

Plato, then, conformably to his doctrine of preëxistence, represents the Deity as forming at once all human souls, and committing them to the care of the inferior gods. They were distributed in equal portions to the stars, or, as he afterward says, some to the earth, some to the moon, and some to the other measurers of time, to be embodied in proper season. "He gave," says Plato, "to the newly-created gods the office of forming mortal bodies, and what was further necessary to be conjoined with the human soul, of furnishing whatever is connected with these inferior parts of man, and of ruling and directing the mortal animal in the best manner, except so far as he may cause evil to himself."*

Plato, it appears, believed that the Supreme Being exercised no immediate government over the concerns of men. The Gnostics believed the same. Plato taught that man, as he exists on earth, and the lower animals, with all the provision made for their wants, were the work of inferior powers. With this the doctrine of the Gnostics coincided. He supposed the immortal part of man to have been furnished by the Supreme Being; and the theosophic Gnostics, in like manner, taught that the spiritual principle in man, which

* *Timæus*, pp. 39-42. *Conf.* p. 69.

alone was by nature immortal, was derived from the *Pleroma*.

It is unnecessary here to explain the vague, undetermined, dazzling conceptions of the Supreme Being which floated in misty light before the mind of Plato. As regards our present purpose, the point to be attended to is the impassable distance to which he removes him from the beings of this earth, and the interposition of inferior gods, as the immediate makers and governors of men, and the proper objects of their religious worship. He does not remark that to him no temples were raised, no prayers addressed, no devotion of the heart offered up. He was that unknown God, whom St. Paul, three centuries after the death of the philosopher, first announced to the Athenians, as the only God, who alone "made the world and all that it contains, and gave to all, life and breath and all things."

In the tenth book of his "*Laws*," Plato defends earnestly the doctrine of a divine providence, nor has he written any thing of a more religious character. Here, as elsewhere in his writings, one benevolent being, the author of all good, sometimes breaks through the cloud;* but the whole tenor of the discourse is to defend the existence, the providence, and the worship of the *gods*. In another part of the same work, after saying, that the only way to obtain the friendship of *God* (to translate verbally), or (to express what I suppose the true meaning) the friendship of Divinity,—of what is Divine,—is to become like *God*, he says, that hence "follows a principle, the best and truest of all, that for a good man to offer sacrifices and to have intercourse with the gods [the word is here in the plural] by vows, and oblations, and every form of worship, is in the highest degree beautiful and good, most conducive to a happy life, and exceedingly proper; while the contrary of all this is true as regards a bad man."† There was nothing, I think, incongruous with the theology

* I refer particularly to what is said p. 896, seqq. and pp. 903, 904.

† De Legibus, Lib. iv. p. 716.

either of Socrates or Plato in the belief of the former, that he was under the guidance of a good dæmon ; nor in his directing, just before his death, a cock to be sacrificed to Esculapius, considered as the god who delivered men from the maladies of life ; nor in the respect which his disciple Xenophon had for the heathen auguries and rites of worship.

In the work of Plato from which I have quoted,* there are two other opinions that deserve notice in relation to our subject. One is, that he conceives that there are in the universe two souls, or principles of life, one good and the other evil.† To this we shall hereafter have occasion to refer. The other is, that here, as elsewhere, he regards the stars, and especially the bodies of our solar system, as animated or moved by gods who ruled over the earth.‡ With this I conceive that the doctrine of the theosophic Gnostics corresponded. They ascribed to the Creator six assistant angels, to whom together with him they assigned seven heavens or spheres, of which they were the informing spirits.§ There can be little doubt that they regarded these spheres as those of the Sun, the Moon, and the five primary planets, beside the earth, with which they were acquainted.

The doctrine, that the world is governed by powers inferior to the Supreme, appears throughout the writings of Plato. I will give one or two more examples. In that imperishable account which he has left of the last hours of Socrates, in which the striking sentiment forms such a contrast with the wretched reasoning, he represents the friends of that philo-

* I hardly know whether, in thus quoting the "Laws," it is worth while to notice the skepticism of a modern German editor of Plato, Ast, (*Platon's Leben und Schriften*, p. 384, seqq.,) who denies to Plato the authorship of this work, which is ascribed to him by his disciple Aristotle. If it were not his work, there must have been another philosopher wholly unknown, another Plato, we may say, lost in obscurity, who as much deserved to be remembered as his contemporary whose name has spread over the world.

† *De Legibus*, Lib. x. 896.

‡ *Ibid.* Lib. vii. pp. 821, 822. — Lib. x. pp. 886, 898, 899. *Timæus*, pp. 39, 40.

§ *Irenæus*, Lib. i. c. 5. § 2. p. 24.

sopher as inquiring, "How he could with so much ease leave them, and the gods whom he himself professed to be beneficent rulers." Amid the moral sublimity of this dialogue, we should hardly have been surprised, if Socrates had directly raised his mind to the one Supreme, and replied in such language as a Christian might use, that he was

" Safe in the hand of one disposing Power,
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour."

But the answer of the philosopher is different. It is sufficient for my purpose to give only its commencement: "If I did not think that I was going in the first place to other gods wise and good, and then to men who have died, better than those who are here, I should be wrong in not being distressed at the thought of death." *

In the seventh book of his "Laws," Plato says: "As regards what is in the highest sense divine, and the universal world,† it is affirmed [by the generality] that we must not busy ourselves in searching into the laws of their nature; for that this is unholy." By "what is in the highest sense divine," Plato apparently intends the Sun and the Moon, "the great gods," as he calls them, and the planets, to which in common with them he gives the name of "celestial gods." In opposition to the rule just alleged, he proceeds to state what he represents as facts concerning these divinities, very important even in their religious bearing, namely, that their apparent are not their real motions, but that they revolve in circles; and that those of them which seem to move most swiftly in fact move most slowly.

"It is difficult," says Plato, in a passage which at once throws a broad light over the whole subject, "to discover the Maker and Father of the universe, and impossible, when discovered, to speak of him to the generality." ‡ Cicero in his

* Phædo, p. 63. Conf. p. 69.

† Τὸν μέγιστον θεὸν καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον: verbally, "The greatest God and the whole world." p. 821.

‡ Timæus, p. 28.

version of this passage uses stronger language ; “ to point him out to the vulgar is forbidden.” * Cicero, himself, who, in clearness of mind, good sense, and high moral sentiment, stands almost or altogether alone among the wise of ancient times, in his treatise “ Concerning Laws,” suggested by that of Plato, enforces like him the worship of the *gods*. In discussing what he regarded as the fundamental doctrine of religion, it is “ Of the Nature of the Gods,” that he treats, and it is their providence which he represents the most religious as asserting. In the first part of the following sentence the Christian Lactantius may express himself too strongly, especially if he is to be understood as referring to the times before Christianity, but he does not express himself too strongly in its conclusion. “ Though poets,” he says, “ and philosophers and even polytheists often acknowledge the Supreme God, yet no one has ever entered into any inquiry or discussion concerning his worship or the honour due to him.” †

The philosophy of Plato, which in recognising a Supreme Being, as a glorious but indistinct vision, removed him at the same time from all superintendence of the concerns of men, and subjected these to the government of inferior gods, in the worship of whom all practical religion consisted, was the highest theology of ancient Greece and Rome before Christianity. ‡ This theology was the basis of the theory common to the Gnostics. But they modified it by two leading conceptions which they derived from Christianity. Admitting the truth of both the Jewish and Gospel history, they maintained that the Unknown God had at last manifested himself to men through Christ, and had called them away from the worship of the rulers of this material universe ; and, conform-

* “ Indicare in vulgus nefas.”

† “ Sed tamen summum Deum, cum et philosophi, et poetæ, et ipsi denique qui deos colant, sæpe fateantur, de cultu tamen et honoribus ejus nemo unquam requisivit, nemo disseruit.” De Irâ Dei, § 11.

‡ Respecting the theology of the ancient philosophers, one may further consult Leland’s “ Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation ” (Part I. Chh. x.-xvii.),—a work of uncommon trustworthiness and value.

ably to the manner in which they received and interpreted the declarations of the Old Testament, they thought, that among those rulers the god of the Jews was the chief. There was a family likeness between the theology of the heathen philosophers and that of the Gnostics. But the catholic Christians, notwithstanding some striking resemblances which we shall hereafter observe, were essentially separated from both. "We shall not," says Tertullian, "approximate to the opinions of Gentiles, who, if ever they are compelled to acknowledge God, introduce other gods below him."*

But the doctrine of subordinate agents in the creation and government of the world was not confined to the heathen philosophers and the Gnostics. Before the time of the latter, it had passed into the theology of the Jews. The Jewish philosopher, Philo, in commenting upon the words, "Let us make man," repeatedly represents the Deity as addressing his Powers, and charging them with the formation of all that may tend to evil in the mind of man, because "he deemed it requisite to assign to other artificers the production of evil, reserving to himself alone the production of good."† In this hypothesis, Philo is not always consistent with himself; nor does it agree throughout with that of the Gnostics. But the rudiments of various Gnostic speculations exist in his writings; and the transition was easy from his doctrine of subordinate ministers, introduced that God might not be considered as the author of evil, to the Gnostic doctrine of the Creator with his associates. He himself, as may be perceived from what has been before said, derived his doctrine from Plato.‡

* *Adversus Hermogenem*, c. 7. p. 235.

† *De Profugis*, Tom. i. p. 556. *De Mundi Opificio*. i. 17. *De Confusione Linguarum*. i. 431, seqq.

‡ See before, pp. 178, 179.—I do not enlarge on the opinions of Philo in relation to the subject before us, as I have formerly explained them at some length in another work. See "Reasons for not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians," Section x. p. 251, seqq.

In the later Rabbis may be found the conception, that seventy angels ruled over, and were the gods of, the seventy nations into which the Gentile world was supposed to be divided; while the Creator is represented as reserving the Israelites for himself, and is sometimes said to be their immediate governor, and sometimes to have appointed over them the archangel Michael as his vicegerent. The angels ruling the Gentiles are by some described as seventy angels who surround the throne of God, and form his council; by some, in accordance with a common belief of antiquity, as spirits animating planets and stars and governing through their influences; and by some as evil spirits, the idolatrous gods of the Gentiles, having for their chief, Sammael, the angel of death, the same with Satan. It was supposed, that the different nations prospered or suffered according to their rule; and that, when these nations were at war, their angels warred together likewise.* If these were merely the notions of the later Jews, they would not deserve notice in reference to our present subject; but similar conceptions prevailed among the Jews soon after their return from the Babylonish captivity. We find them in the book which they ascribed to Daniel, where the prince, that is, the angel, of Persia is represented as having withstood another angel, till Michael, who is spoken of as the angel of the Jews, came to his assistance; and where the prince or angel of Greece is likewise mentioned.† These conceptions appear also in the false rendering given in the Septuagint of a passage in Deuteronomy;‡ “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he determined the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel.” Instead of the last clause, “according to the number of the children of Israel,” the rendering of the Septuagint is, “according to the number of the angels.”

* Eisenmengers Entdecktes Judenthum, i. e. Judaism Unveiled. Th. i. p. 803, seqq.

† Daniel x. 13, 20.

‡ Ch. xxxii. 8.

The doctrine of the Jews concerning the government of the heathen world by angels was adopted by many of the fathers, who appealed for proof of it to the passage in the Septuagint just mentioned, and to the representations in Daniel. It deserves notice, not as showing the coincidence, but the parallelism, of opinions, that Origen introduces this doctrine in opposition to an opinion advanced by Celsus, that the nations were each ruled by a power or powers, to whom it had been committed from the beginning, and whose peculiar laws and worship each was bound to maintain.* Respecting the character of these angels of the nations, the opinions of the fathers were unsettled, like those of the Jewish Rabbis. The prevailing conception of Origen appears to have been, that, though appointed by God to their office, they had become degenerate and bad; and that when Christ was manifested, their dread of losing their rule made them enemies of him and his followers.† Regarding the heathen world as subject to them, he expresses himself concerning the coming of Christ in such language as might have been used by the Gnostics; "As, then, the princes of this world [the angels ruling this world] had seized on the portion of the Lord, it was necessary for the good Shepherd, leaving the ninety-nine in heaven, to descend to earth, that he might find and bear away on his shoulders the sheep that was lost, and bring it back to the fold of perfection above."‡ The conception of Christ's leaving ninety-nine of his flock in heaven, and of his bearing back thither the sheep that was lost, is founded on doctrines which Origen derived from Plato. Following Plato, Origen believed in the preëxistence of souls, and that those souls that were here embodied had fallen from a higher state. The theosophic Gnostics, likewise, believed, that the spiritual principle, so far as it existed in men, or in other

* Cont. Celsum, Lib. v. §§ 25, 26. Opp. i. 596, seqq.

† De Principiis, Lib. iii. c. 3. Opp. i. 143. Homil. in Genesin, ix. § 3. Opp. ii. 85, 86. Comment. in Epist. ad Romanos, Lib. viii. § 12. Opp. iv. 639.

‡ Homil. ix. in Genesin, ubi sup.

words *the spirits* of men, had fallen from the Pleroma, and that the Saviour had come to deliver what was spiritual from its connection with matter, and to restore it to its original seat. Some of them, it may seem from what is said by Irenæus, applied the parable of the lost sheep in much the same manner as it was used by Origen.*

Parallel with the doctrine concerning the government of the heathen world by angels was another concerning the gods of the Heathens; but the bearing of the two upon each other does not appear to have been so defined as to make it possible to adjust them together into one connected and consistent scheme. "The Gentiles," says St. Paul, "offer their sacrifices to dæmons and not to God;"† and there is no doubt that the word "dæmon" is used by the Apostle in a bad sense. Accordingly, the fathers regarded the gods of the pagan mythology as evil dæmons, ministers of Satan. Him they conceived of as ruling over them and their pagan worshippers. In the view of the fathers, those gods were impure spirits, burdened with material vehicles, and inhaling for their nourishment the fumes of incense and sacrifices. Whatever marvels in the pagan religion were not the work of human fraud, whatever was really supernatural in oracles, omens, and appearances of the gods, was to be ascribed to them. They were deadly enemies of Christianity, through which their worship was to be done away, and were continually exciting their worshippers to persecute and destroy the Christians. The pagan world was, in a certain sense, the realm of Satan. These conceptions have been adopted, and made familiar to modern readers, by the great poet of Christian mythology, who describes the fallen angels as becoming

"known to men by various names,
And various idols, through the heathen world."

The doctrine concerning the rule of Satan over the world

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 8. § 4. p. 39. c. 16. § 1. p. 80.

† 1 Corinthians x. 20.

finally assumed a form among catholic Christians, in which it may be compared with the most unfavorable representations that have been given of Gnosticism, and in which it is not distinguished, by any characteristic that may recommend it, from what was regarded as the odious heresy of the Manichæans. Even so early as the second century, the lineaments of that belief on this subject which afterwards prevailed are distinctly traced in a passage of Athenagoras. According to Athenagoras, Satan was originally created an angel of light, and intrusted by God with the administration of matter, and the forms of matter. This ruler of matter, and the other angels who rule over the affairs of this first "firmament," fell into sin through the abuse of their moral liberty. Satan became an enemy of God; and his administration is opposite to the goodness of God. Hence, he says, the poet Euripides doubted whether there was any divine providence over the concerns of men, and the philosopher Aristotle denied its existence. According to Athenagoras himself, the providence of God regulates the general order of the universe, but "men are moved and carried in different directions according to the nature of each, and the operations of that ruler who is over them, and of his associate dæmons," who excite in men irregular desires conformable to their own natures.*

Thus, instead of the Gnostic Creator, Athenagoras subjected men to the government of Satan, whom he viewed as the ruler of matter. This was his solution of the existence of evil. The doctrine was remotely derived from the Persian theology, into which it had been introduced to solve the same difficulty. We will briefly trace its history; for in different forms it entered both into the theology of the orthodox church and the heresies of the Gnostics and the Manichæans.

Our sources of information respecting the Persian theology, including the collection of writings entitled the Zend-Avesta, are of such uncertain credit, and so imperfect and contra-

* Athenagoræ Legatio pro Christianis, pp. 302-304. Ed. Benedict.

dictory, that we can speak with but little confidence of its history or vicissitudes, or of the detail of any particular system in which it appeared. But notwithstanding the cloud which has spread over it, some remarkable characteristics are to be obscurely discerned. The Persian sages appear from an early period to have held in some form or other the belief of one supreme beneficent Being. But they regarded the universe as divided into two opposite empires, the empire of light and the empire of darkness. The former was conceived of as the region of pure and happy beings, over whom reigned the beneficent God, Ormuzd. The latter was the domain of evil, peopled with malignant dæmons under the rule of Ahriman. This world was conceived of as being on the confines of these two empires, the result of their commingling and strife, the seat of their warfare, a region where the beneficent God and the Prince of evil held divided sway. Hence it is, to use words that express the doctrine as truly as would the simplest prose, that

“the same earth
Bears fruit and poison; where the camel finds
His fragrant food, the horned viper there
Sucks in the juice of death: the elements
Now serve the use of man, and now assert
Dominion o’er his weakness: dost thou hear
The sound of merriment and nuptial song?
From the next house proceeds the mourner’s cry,
Lamenting o’er the dead.”

The Persian doctrine implies but a very imperfect conception of the omnipotence of God. But the same remark may be made of every other ancient system of theology, excepting the Christian. Nor is it probable that the generality of ancient Christians entertained any adequate ideas of this divine attribute. These are facts which it is necessary to bear in mind in studying the theological speculations of the ancients, which may otherwise appear to us even more incongruous than they were.

Manes, or Manichæus, who was a Persian, blended with

Christianity the theology of his country ; and thus, in the latter half of the third century, became the founder of the sect of the Manichæans. In common with the Gnostics, and other framers of religious systems, it was a main purpose with him to account for the origin of evil. Ahriman was in his system easily converted into Satan ; and according to him evil had its origin in eternal matter necessarily existing, and the dæmons resident in it and ruling over it, of whom Satan was the chief. They had made an incursion into the spiritual world, and, seizing upon a portion of spirit, had mingled it with matter and founded this world. To redeem this portion of spirit from its enthrallment was the purpose of the interposition of God by Christ, and by Manes himself, who was Christ's successor, and the perfecter of his work.

From the Ahriman of the Persians, the Jews, long before the time of Manes, probably derived their conception of Satan, the *Adversary* of God and man. Their notions concerning him were, however, modified by their belief of the supremacy of God, so that they regarded him as always under God's control. But he and his ministers were popularly conceived of by them, as causing the moral and physical disorders in the world, as tempting men to sin, and vexing them with diseases. From the Jews this conception passed into the theology of Christians. Our Saviour in his discourses used forms of speech founded upon these notions of his countrymen. It was his purpose to give his hearers a more vivid impression of the evil of certain acts and states of character by thus figuratively referring them to Satan as their source, and associating them with his hateful and terrific image. The same use of language likewise occurs in the writings of the Apostles ; and though they nowhere teach the popular doctrine as a doctrine of religion, yet it is not probable that the mind of any one of them was wholly unaffected by it. When, accordingly, this belief concerning Satan began to prevail among Christians, every thing in the New Testament which appeared to favor it was interpreted literally, and made a

ground for further inferences. We have seen the form which it had early assumed in the writings of Athenagoras ; but the ghastly phantom which he presents as ruling over the world, afterwards dilated its terrors ;*

“Horribili super adpectu mortalibus instans.”

The doctrine of Athenagoras, which subjected the world to the rule of Satan, is more objectionable than the Gnostic doctrine, which subjected it to the rule of the Creator. But many or most of the Gnostics, as we shall again have occasion to observe, appear likewise to have introduced Satan, or the animate principle of evil resident in matter, as the adversary of the Creator and his works.

In looking to a very different part of the catholic system of faith, we find another analogy between the doctrine of the Gnostics and that of the early Christian fathers, which is remarked upon by Origen himself. Origen says, that the distinction made by the heretics in affirming that the Creator is just, and the Father of Christ good, may, in his opinion, when accurately understood, be said of the Father and the Son.

* Dr. Thomas Burnet is a writer not likely to be charged with fanaticism or superstition. One may, therefore, be somewhat surprised at meeting with a passage in his posthumous work, “*De Fide et Officiis Christianorum*,” (p. 70,) of which the following is a translation. “The Gentiles appear to have given themselves up to the dominion of evil spirits, who by the permission of God had obtained the empire of this world. To this their chief laid claim, when, having shown to Christ all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, he said to him, Luke iv. 6, *I will give thee power over the whole and the glory of those kingdoms, for it is committed to me, and I give it to whom I will.* We know that the Devil is a deceiver ; but Christ himself also repeatedly calls him the Prince of this world, John xii. 31 ; xiv. 30 ; xvi. 11. Whatever was his right or title, he seems at that time to have had possession of the world ; and, God being as it were excluded, the ordering of affairs was at the pleasure of dæmons.” The philosophy of Athenagoras, it appears, had survived in full vigor to the eighteenth century. The errors of the ancient fathers and the ancient heretics, which were adopted for the purpose, however unskillfully executed, of vindicating the goodness of God, and which were countenanced and supported by the philosophy of the age, are to be differently regarded from the corresponding errors of later times, some of which now stand insulated amid the intellectual and moral improvement of the world.

The Son is just ; he has received authority to judge the world righteously. Men are here prepared by the various discipline which he appoints in justice for the time when he will deliver up his kingdom, when God, being all in all, will display his goodness toward those who have been disciplined by his Son ; and perhaps *all* things, Origen adds, may be thus prepared for its reception. Christ himself has said that the Father alone is good. In like manner, Origen thinks that a true sense may be given to the proposition, that there is one superior to the Creator, Christ being regarded as the Creator ; for the Father is greater than he.* All those Christians of the first three centuries who conceived of the Logos as a person, believed like the Gnostics in a creator of the Universe inferior to the Supreme Being ; for they referred its creation immediately to the Logos. It is only in this point, however, that there is any analogy between the Logos of the ancient fathers and the Creator of the Gnostics. In other respects the Logos corresponds rather to the first manifestation or developement of the Deity in the Gnostic system of Æons.

Thus, on every side, we perceive an approximation to the doctrine of the Gnostics respecting the creation and government of the world by a being or beings inferior to the Supreme. We may suppose that they came to the study of Christianity prepossessed with the philosophical doctrine, that human affairs were under the government of inferior gods, the Supreme Divinity being far removed from their superintendence. Looking back upon the state of mankind, they saw, on the one hand, that the Father of All, as revealed by Christianity, had been an unknown God to the Gentile world. On the other hand, the gross and limited conceptions which the generality of the Jews entertained of God, under the name of Jehovah, and even the representations of the Old Testament concerning him, seemed to them to relate to a being far

* Comment. in Joan. Tom. i. § 40. Opp. iv. 41.

inferior to that God whom Christ had made known. They were thus led to the conclusion, that the Father of All had first revealed himself to men by Christ, and through him had first interposed to deliver all that was spiritual and pure in the Universe from the thralldom of matter. Their doctrine might seem to them but little more than the declaration of an historical fact, that the true God was unknown to men before he was revealed by Christ.

In almost every age, wherever the belief of one Supreme Being has been received, imperfect notions of his nature and moral government, and the observation of the defects, irregularities, and evils real or apparent, which exist in the present state of things, have led to conceptions more or less correspondent to those of the Gnostics. Some other being or beings have been interposed between God and his creatures, as having an immediate control over the physical or moral world. To the causes mentioned we may refer the famous doctrine of the very learned Cudworth concerning the unconscious soul of the world, Plastic Nature, as he denominates it, a being to the immediate agency of which he refers all physical changes; and which he describes in language not altogether intelligible, as "a creature incorporeal though low and imperfect," but "an energetic and effectual principle, moving matter by some energy of its own," "acting for ends artificially, yet neither intending those ends, nor understanding the reason of what it does, and therefore unable to act electively," "the Divine Art concrete, and embodied in matter," "the manuary opificer of the Divine understanding." The reasons which Cudworth assigns for introducing this agent might have been adopted with little variation by the Gnostics in defence of their doctrine of an imperfect Creator. They are, because it seems "not decorous in respect to God, nor agreeable to reason, that he himself should do all things immediately and miraculously," for this "would render Divine Providence operose, solicitous, and distractions;" because the supposition is inconsistent

“with the slow and gradual progress of things in nature;” whereas if the agent were omnipotent, the end proposed would be effected at once, without what would seem “this vain and idle pomp;” and, further, because the supposition is inconsistent “with those errors and bumbles that are committed, when the matter is inept and contumacious, which argue the agent not to be irresistible.”* This theory was not only maintained by Cudworth, but countenanced and defended as not improbable, by Le Clerc, a man extraordinarily free from mysticism and extravagance, whose intellectual vigor has preserved his writings to our own time in almost their original freshness. Even at the present day we are hardly disembarassed from the conception of Nature, not as a poetical personification, but as a real agent; and there are but few, perhaps, who habitually recognise in the operations of the physical world only an uninterrupted display of God’s power in immediate action. We are hardly yet familiar with the belief, that it is God alone, who

“ Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees ;
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart ;
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns.” †

It may readily be supposed that the catholic Christians found no difficulty in confuting the theory of the Gnostics respecting an inferior Creator or Creators. The following is a summary of the reasoning of Irenæus. If it be said, that the world was made either by angels or by any inferior being, without the will of God, it must be supposed that the angels are more powerful than God, or that he is indifferent to what

* Intellectual System of the Universe, p. 146, seqq. Original folio edition.

† The concluding lines are to be understood as meaning, that a hair and a heart, a man and an angel, are all equally produced and preserved in being by Divine power, by power full and perfect; and that no one of them is the work of any agent inferior to God.

takes place. It would be idle to conceive of the world as thus formed within his realm, where he is present; and if formed without it, his being is circumscribed, and he ceases to be infinite. This argument might seem trifling, if the theosophic Gnostics had not placed the material world without the *Pleroma*, the complete developement of God, and thus afforded sufficient occasion for it. One other is added by Irenæus. If the world, he says, exists conformably to the will, and with the knowledge, of God, he is properly its maker, whoever might be the immediate agents in its formation. Those agents derived their being from him, and are to be considered only as instruments in his hands.—The very obviousness and simplicity of these arguments throws light on the state of opinion and reasoning to which men had advanced in the age of Irenæus.*

But the Gnostics, on the other hand, were not wanting in arguments to support their doctrine of a subordinate Creator and an Unknown God. We have seen how correspondent this doctrine was to opinions universally prevalent both among Heathens and Christians. The Gnostics conceived, that the history of the world made it evident that the True God had been unknown to men till he was revealed by Christ. They dwelt upon the representations of the Divinity in the Old Testament, to prove that the God of the Jews could not be the True God, the God of Christians; while, at the same time, admitting the authority of the Old Testament, they recognised his claim to be the Creator of the material universe. They argued from the imperfections and evils of the world, that it could not be the work of a good and omnipotent Being, but bore evident marks of an imperfect maker. And they found, as they thought, full confirmation of their doctrine in the words of Christ; “No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son may reveal him.” These words, which they often quoted, they considered as affording un-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. ii. c. 2. p. 117.

equivocal proof that Christ came to reveal an Unknown God.* They alleged also other passages to the same effect. Thus, they quoted what is said by John in his Gospel, "No one has seen God at any time," as proving that the God revealed by Christ was not the god who had been seen by Moses and the patriarchs.† And they appealed to our Lord's declaration to the Jews, "Ye know neither me nor my Father," as evincing that the god known to the Jews was not *his* Father.‡

We have thus attended to one of the causes which the Gnostics assigned for the evils in the world,—the imperfection of its immediate Maker, or Makers. We have next to consider their opinions respecting the evil nature of matter.

* Among the many passages in which this argument of the Gnostics is noticed, it may be sufficient to refer to Irenæus, *Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 20. § 3. p. 93. Lib. iv. c. 6. § 1. p. 233*; and to Tertullian, *Advers. Marcionem, Lib. iv. c. 25. p. 441*.

† Origen. *De Principiis, Lib. ii. c. 4. § 3. Opp. i. 85*.

‡ Origen. *Comment. in Joan. Tom. xix. Opp. iv. 283*.

CHAPTER VI.

(CONTINUED.)

ON THE SYSTEM OF THE GNOSTICS AS INTENDED FOR A
SOLUTION OF THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL IN THE WORLD.

SECTION II.

On their Opinions concerning Evil, as inherent in Matter.

“THE Marcionites believe,” says Clement of Alexandria, “that nature is bad, as proceeding from evil matter and a just Maker;” * that is, a Maker who is only just. Such was the belief of the Gnostics in general. But there was nothing peculiar to them in their opinion, that evil inheres in matter, nor in their application of this doctrine to account for the evils in the world. The theory had been common long before their time. It was connected with the general doctrine of ancient heathen philosophy concerning the independent existence of matter.

Until the period when Christianity taught men to form a new idea of the power of God, as able to cause that to be which did not before exist, matter was regarded by the ancient philosophers as uncreated and eternal. In the view of Plato it was not the product of divine power, but (to use the language of Cudworth) *the inept and contumacious material* on which that power was exercised. In his dialogue, entitled “The Statesman,” there is a long and strange passage concerning the revolutions of the world, caused by the refractory

* Stromat. iii. § 3. p. 515.

tendencies in matter, during intervals in which the divine power that controls those tendencies is suspended.* He describes the world as, after one of these revolutions, fulfilling its appointed laws, at first accurately, but afterward more dully and negligently. "And the cause of this," he says, "is the bodily part of its composition, inherent of old in its nature; for this, being full of disorder before it entered into the composition of the world, received all that it has good from him who compounded it; but whatever is bad and wrong in the universe proceeds from it, and is produced by it in living beings, in consequence of its former tendencies."† In his *Timæus* he represents God as taking matter,‡ which was in discordant and disorderly motion, and reducing it from disorder to order; "it being his will that all things should be good, and, as far as might be, nothing bad;"§ and in the same dialogue he presents the conception of *necessity*,|| by which he apparently intends what necessarily exists in matter, as controlled by the power of the Deity.¶ In his *Laws*, the work of his old age, there is a remarkable passage, before referred to,** in which he teaches that there are at least two souls (or principles of motion) pervading the universe, one beneficent, and the other of an opposite character.††

* *Politicus*, p. 269, seqq. One of the most respectable of the German writers on Plato, Socher, contends, I think on very insufficient grounds, that this dialogue is not the work of Plato. (*Ueber Platon's Schriften*, p. 273, seqq.) There is, however, no dispute that the Dialogue is of the age of Plato, for it is quoted by Aristotle; nor that it was generally reputed to be his work. The question of its genuineness, therefore, is unimportant, so far as it is adduced only to show the antiquity of the doctrine of evil in matter, and that this doctrine was supported by the authority of Plato's name.

† *Ibid.* p. 278.

‡ "Matter;" the expression of Plato is *πάν ὅσα ἐν ὁρατῷ*, "whatever was visible." It is a remarkable fact, forcibly illustrating the state of philosophy in Plato's time, that neither the word *ὕλη* in the sense of "matter," nor any other word appropriate to the expression of that idea, occurs in his writings.—See Additional Note, E.

§ *Timæus*, p. 30.

¶ *Timæus*, pp. 48. 56.

†† *De Legibus*, p. 896.

|| *Ἀνάγκη*.

** See before, p. 181.

There is here no direct mention of matter; but the passage was understood by Plutarch, and by others of the later admirers and expositors of Plato, as referring to a soul without intellect, resident in matter, and producing its disorderly motion while in its unformed state. This, Plutarch regarded as the principle of evil in the universe; and the existence of some such principle, he says, had been affirmed by the greater part of preceding theologists and philosophers.*

During the second and third centuries, the doctrine, that matter, having an independent existence, is the source of evil, attracted attention among Christians; and treatises were written in opposition to it. It was generally rejected by the catholic Christians, who believed matter to have been created by God. It was however maintained by Hermogenes, who was not a Gnostic, and against whom Tertullian wrote a treatise still extant. Arnobius, likewise, a Christian writer of the third century, asks the question; "What if primitive matter (*prima materies*), which has been disposed into the four elements, contain the causes of all miseries?" † though this appears not to have been his own opinion.

That the body is the antagonist principle of evil in man is a natural branch of the doctrine, that matter is the antagonist principle of evil in the universe. But the former opinion subsisted unconnected with the latter, or connected but loosely and obscurely. By the Gnostics it was adopted in its whole extent. But it was no novel doctrine.

Plato taught, as we have already seen, that the body was not the original residence of the soul.‡ Through the appointment of God, or from necessity, or in consequence of its own fault, or its intrinsic weakness (for he is not consistent with himself in his representations), it had been removed, or

* The passages from Plutarch relating to this subject, may be found collected by Cudworth and Mosheim in the *Systema Intellectuale* a Mosheim. Tom. i. p. 299, seqq.

† *Advers. Gentes*, Lib. i. p. 6. Ed. Thysii. 1651.

‡ See before, pp. 178, 179.

had fallen, from its first estate, and become immersed and entangled in matter.* The philosophical doctrine of the immortality of the soul, widely different from the Christian, was connected with the belief of its preëxistence either through the past duration of the universe, or from eternity, and of its having undergone many changes of being, and reappeared on earth in many different forms. According to Plato, the soul being confined within the body, is in consequence subjected to the violent affections connected with the senses, to desire mingled with pleasure and pain, and to fear and anger. Its perceptions are darkened, and its powers enthralled. It is surrounded by a world of delusion ; and all its true knowledge consists in the reminiscences of the Ideas with which it was conversant in a higher state of existence, reminiscences awakened by the imperfect resemblances of those Ideas which material things present. Plato, accordingly, describes it as the highest purpose of philosophy, to loosen the connection by which the soul is bound and agglutinated within the body, to withdraw it from the senses, except so far as we are by necessity compelled to use them, to enable it to be alone, collected within itself, and thus to free it, as far as possible, from pleasures and desires, and sorrows and fears, and by the exercise of all virtue to prepare it for a return to the life of the gods.†

The doctrine, that the body is the great source of moral evil, was common in ancient times. Philo, the Jewish philosopher, adopted on this subject the conceptions and language of Plato. He speaks of the body as a corpse which we bear about with us, as evil by nature and laying snares for the soul, as a sepulchre in which the soul is entombed, and as a prison full of pollution, from which it must free itself. Every virtue, he says, loves the soul ; every vice, the body ; what is in friendship with one is at enmity with the other. Virtues and

* *Timæus*, p. 41, seqq. *Phædrus*, p. 246, seqq.

† *Timæus*, p. 42, seqq. p. 69. *Phædrus*, pp. 249, 250. *Phædo*, p. 64, seqq. p. 72, seqq. p. 81, seqq.

virtuous deeds are perfect and blameless sacrifices which the body abhors.*

This common sentiment of antiquity appears in the writings of St. Paul. "I know," he says, "that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells nothing good."† He regarded those as left to the influences of the flesh, who were without the spiritual principle to be derived from Christianity. The law in the members, says the Apostle, warring against the law of the mind, brings men into subjection to the law of sin which is in the members.‡ There are passages in which his meaning is likely to be misunderstood from the comparatively limited sense in which the word *flesh* has been metaphorically used in modern times, as denoting only the irregular appetites. He, on the other hand, according to the philosophy of his age, considers the flesh as the source of moral evil in general. Thus he enumerates among the works of the flesh, "idolatry, magical arts, enmities, quarrels, passion, anger, strife, divisions, parties, hatred, murder."§ Those who have become Christians, he says, have "put off this body of flesh."||

The conceptions which were thus generally entertained, have an obvious foundation in the nature of man. The appetites, by indulging in which the soul "embodies and embrutes," are to be referred to our material part. The diseases which the flesh is heir to, disorder the affections and temper, fill the mind with phantoms of misery, disturb the judgment, and sometimes lay waste the intellect; and in our best estate, "the corruptible body weighs down the soul; and the earthly tabernacle burdens the mind full of many thoughts." Still the body is not the sepulchre, but the cradle of the soul. It

* Legum Allegoriæ, Lib. iii. Tom. i. pp. 100, 101. De Creatione Principum, ii. 367. De Migratione Abrahami, i. 437. Quis Rerum divinarum Hæres, i. 507. De Profugis, i. 548.

† Romans vii. 18.

‡ Ibid. verse 23.

§ Galatians v. 20, 21.

|| Colossians ii. 11.— I omit τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν (*of the sins*) with Griesbach and others.

is a necessary condition of the present life, of this school of discipline and instruction, which Divine Wisdom has prepared for us at the commencement of our being, and in which our powers of action, our capacities of enjoyment, and the objects around us, are so adjusted to each other, as to promote the moral growth of the newly-formed inhabitant of the universe. In a philosophical view, the body is not a clog upon the mind ; it may rather be compared to the weight which gives motion to a piece of machinery ; for its wants and desires are what first rouse the mind to action, and gradually bring into exercise its highest powers and best affections. If we cannot call the appetites the germ of our virtues, yet they may almost be considered as the soil in which our virtues take root. From them spring industry and forethought, which, as regards the greater part of men, are exercised most strenuously in supplying their demands ; and they call into exercise self-control, the first requisite in our moral discipline. The relation between the sexes becomes the source of the most disinterested love, and of all the domestic charities. And it is in witnessing the bodily wants and sufferings of our fellow-creatures, that compassion and benevolence are first awakened.

It is remarkable, that the conception of the evil nature of the body, though recommended by such authority, and though it subsequently had an essential influence in strengthening the ascetic system of morality among Christians, does not appear to have found much favor with the early fathers, any more than the doctrine of an evil principle in matter. Even Clement of Alexandria, whom we should suppose likely, as much as any one, to have been influenced by the Platonic philosophy, expressly contends that “ neither the soul is good, nor the body bad, by nature.” *

The Gnostics, adopting the common doctrine of their age

* Stromat. Lib. iv. § 26. p. 639. Conf. Lib. iii. § 11. p. 545. § 16. p. 559.

concerning the evil nature of the body, were further distinguished from the catholic Christians by some of the inferences which they drew from it. A portion of them made it a ground for strict asceticism and abstinence from all the pleasures of sense. Some, on the other hand, conformably to what has been before stated,* are said to have found in it a license for criminal indulgence. They pretended that the vile body was so apart from the spirit, that the one could not be contaminated by the affections of the other. With many Gnostics it was probably not more operative in its practical influence, than with the majority of other individuals by whom it was held. But it led them generally to the belief that Christ had not a proper human body of flesh and blood. It also caused them to deny "the resurrection of the body." The question concerning this subject was one of those most strongly contested between the Gnostics and the catholic Christians, however uninteresting the debate may appear to a philosopher of the present day.

In connection with the notions of the Gnostics concerning the causes of evil, it remains to speak of their opinions relating to the Devil. But our direct and credible information on this subject is scanty. The conception of him as a personal agent does not appear to have been essential to their system. The notices still remaining which they themselves gave of their opinions are inconsistent with the representations of the fathers. A comparison of them together may serve to show with what distrust we should regard the accounts of the fathers, even those of the best authority, when they are not dwelt upon and explained at length, nor confirmed by their intrinsic probability, nor by their consistency with what is known of the system of the Gnostics, nor by collateral evidence. It thus illustrates the impracticability, which for the most part exists, of pursuing our inquiries respecting the doctrines of the Gnostics upon any safe grounds,

* See before, pp. 76, 77 ; p. 79, seqq.

when those inquiries extend beyond the great, characteristic features of their belief.

Irenæus, in his account of the Ptolemæo-Valentinian theory,* says, that according to Ptolemy the Devil was formed by the Creator, that he was called *Cosmocrator*, or the Ruler of the World, having his seat in this lower world, and that, being the *Spirit* of Evil (that is, his nature being *spiritual*), he knew the things above him (he was aware of the existence of the spiritual world, the Pleroma); but that the Creator, not being spiritual, did not know their existence.† In this account Irenæus is followed by Tertullian‡ and other later writers.

But the account is irreconcilable with that which Ptolemy himself gives of his opinions in his Letter to Flora. He there says; "There is one unoriginated Father, from whom properly all things are; for the chain of being depends from him. The essence of the Adversary is destruction and darkness; *for he is material* and multiplex. But the essence of the unoriginated Father of All is incorruption, and light itself pure and uniform. The essence of these two produced a certain twofold power [the Creator].§ But he is the image of the Better."

Here we find the Devil, or the principle of evil in the universe, described not as spiritual (conformably to the account of Irenæus) but as material, and not as produced by the Creator (a statement in itself sufficiently improbable), but as in some way contributing to his production;—the idea of Ptolemy, I conceive, being that matter entered into the composition of the Creator. Ptolemy goes on to exhort Flora not to be troubled by the question, How, when there is one good Being, the principle of all things, whose nature it is to make all things like himself, these two other powers should

* See before, p. 52, seqq.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 5. § 4. p. 26.

‡ Adversus Valentinianos, c. 22. p. 259.

§ 'Η δὲ τούτων οὐσία διττήν μὲν τινὰ δύνάμιν προήγαγεν.

exist, one whose essence is destruction, and the other possessing a middle nature. But unfortunately we have not his answer to this question. He promises to give, at some future time, a solution of it, grounded on the apostolic tradition which had come down to the Gnostics, and confirmed throughout by the teaching of the Saviour.*

From this passage we may judge, that Ptolemy adopting the conception of Plato, Plutarch, and other philosophers, respecting the material soul, or the animate principle of evil in matter, which is at war with order and stability, regarded this principle as the Adversary, the Devil. Such, from all that we can learn concerning the subject, appears to have been the doctrine of the Valentinians. They divided men into three classes, the spiritual, the animal and rational,† and the earthy. The last, according to Heracleon, were of the same substance with the Devil; whom he was so far from considering as spiritual that he denied him the power of will, saying that he had only desires.‡ The same notion of the materiality of the Devil appears in the *Doctrina Orientalis*.§ And, what is remarkable, Irenæus is as inconsistent with himself as with the Gnostic writers who have been quoted. For immediately before the passage that has been adduced from him, he says, that the Valentinians taught that the Devil and the evil dæmons had their origin from a substance which, according to his own account, the Valentinians considered as one form of matter.||

It is probable that what thus appears to have been the doctrine of the Valentinians, namely, that the Devil was the

* Epist. ad Floram, p. 361.

† Οἱ ψυχικοί.

‡ Apud Origen. Comment. in Joan. xx. § 20. Opp. iv. 337-339.

§ *Doctrina Orientalis*, § 48. §§ 52, 53. § 34. Conf. Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 6. § 1. p. 28.

|| Ἐκ δὲ τῆς λύπης — τὴν γένεσιν ἐσχηκέναι. Lib. i. c. 5. § 4. p. 26. For the meaning of ἐκ τῆς λύπης see what immediately precedes in the same section, p. 25, and Irenæus's whole account of the notions of the Valentinians concerning the formation of matter in the fourth and fifth chapters of his first Book.

animate principle of evil in matter, was also the doctrine of the Basilidians and the Marcionites. Of Marcion, Tertullian says, that, "imputing unoriginated, unmade, eternal evil, to unoriginated, unmade, eternal matter, he has thus made a god of evil."* The only question in regard to him or Basilides is, whether they ascribed a personal or animate existence to the principle of evil. This question, as far as regards Marcion, would be determined in the affirmative, if we could trust to the accounts of the writers of the fourth and fifth centuries.

What is certain in regard to the Gnostics in general is, that they regarded the principle of evil, whether animate or inanimate, as inherent in matter. They unquestionably did not agree with the catholic Christians in supposing that Satan and his angels had been created by the Supreme God as good angels, and had fallen through their own wickedness from their high estate;—a conception with which we are familiar through the mythology of Milton. Their doctrine, as we have no reason to doubt, corresponded more nearly with the original Persian doctrine, which had passed, as we have seen, into the philosophy of their times. They believed the antagonist principle in the universe to have been by nature bad and resident in matter. In this respect they were nearly allied to the Manichæans. But it is to be added, that the Valentinians at least do not appear, like the Manichæans, to have considered this principle as having always existed in primitive matter; but to have regarded it as assuming being and life, when primitive matter was endued with its various forms at the creation.

In concluding this subject of the opinions of the Gnostics concerning the immediate causes of evil in this world, it may be remarked, that in proportion as Christianity afforded a more definite idea of a benevolent author of all things, the question of the origin of evil assumed new interest. It being

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 15. p. 373.*

conceded, that the only infinite Power in the universe is purely beneficent, the problem, Why does evil exist, at once presented itself. The thoughts of men were directed to the subject; and the imperfect solution of the Gnostics was but one among those which were formed. The catholic Christians, generally, did not speculate so much concerning it as the heretics, nor were they agreed in their theories. But in the writings of the more philosophical of their number, in those of Clement and Origen, for example, we find some just and noble views. They taught that moral evil was the necessary result of that freedom of agency in created beings, without which they could not be subjects of praise or blame; and that the evils, so called, proceeding from God, were disciplinary and corrective, the admonitions and chastisements of a father, the remedies of a physician.

The generality of the Gnostics adopted the principles that have been explained. But concerning the immersion of spirit in matter the theosophic Gnostics pursued their theory still further into the region of the Pleroma, and found its occasion in disorders, which there took place. But their views on this subject were connected with their whole system of theosophic speculations, and to these we will next attend.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE PECULIAR SPECULATIONS OF THE THEOSOPHIC
GNOSTICS.

SECTION I.*Introductory Remarks on the Character of Ancient Philosophy.*

I FEEL a reluctance to proceed at once to an account of the more imaginative part of the speculations of the Gnostics without some words of preparation. It would be doing them injustice to give a naked statement of their belief, if we may call it by so grave a name, without any explanation of the general character of the philosophy of that period in which it had its origin. A stranger from a foreign land, of which the manners and customs are altogether different from those of the country he is visiting, if brought among individuals unprepared for the peculiarities of his dress and behaviour, would not be more unfairly estimated, nor exposed to more unfounded ridicule, than a speculatist of ancient times, whose opinions should at once be confronted with the conceptions of the present day. It should be understood, also, that a modern language is often but an imperfect instrument for expressing the opinions of an ancient theorist. What is true of poetry is true also of the speculations of the ancients. The plausibility of the latter, like the beauty of the former, not unfrequently depends on a nice adaptation of words, *callida verborum junctura*, which can hardly be imitated in translation, and disappears in an abstract. It is often the case, that modern terms do not sufficiently correspond with those of an ancient language, to admit of their being fitted together in the same manner. Having, then, formerly re-

marked the disadvantage to which the Gnostics are exposed from the circumstance, that our accounts of them are derived principally from their opponents,* we will now attend to the other obstacles which lie in the way of a correct apprehension, and a just estimate, of their more mystical doctrines, arising from the general character of ancient philosophy, and the difficulties attending its study.

The books of ancient philosophers are left us. The dead letter still remains; but it is not easy to reanimate it with their thoughts. The same words are now printed which were originally written, but of the ideas which these words expressed, many have been essentially modified, or have become wholly obsolete. What was once a vivid conception can now be contemplated but dimly and imperfectly. What once was linked with a system of opinions, and recalled many associations, now finds nothing with which to connect itself in our minds. Our sphere of knowledge is greatly enlarged; a much stronger light falls upon it; delusions have disappeared; many objects, which were partially seen and misapprehended, are now clearly discerned, and many present themselves under new aspects and relations. We may translate into our own language the words used by ancient philosophers; but our modern terms are often far from suggesting to our minds the conceptions which those words once conveyed. In the progress of time many ideas have been decomposed, and many have entered into new combinations, forming new aggregates. Every thing changeable in our minds, all but the essential principles of human nature, has been more or less changed. To find in an ancient author a strain of sentiment with which our own feelings fully accord, a series of thoughts which appears to us altogether true, or reasoning which brings conviction to our own minds, is like hearing our native tongue in a strange land. The speculations of the ancients were seldom such, as, being addressed to the

* See before p. 19, seqq.

common reason of men and founded in universal truth, and therefore expressed in its ever intelligible language, require, throughout all ages, only a similar apprehension of truth in order to be understood. The difference between the intellectual character of men in ancient and in modern times may be felt at once ; but long-continued attention is required to comprehend, as far as may be, the extent and nature of the particulars which it embraces. We are continually liable to be deceived by apparent correspondences of language ; and as great mistakes are in consequence sometimes committed in the study of their philosophy, as if, on account of the identity of name, we were to imagine that the consuls of Rome resembled, in power and office, the consuls of modern commercial nations. Language is a full and ready means of communication only between those whose minds have been formed under similar influences, whose ideas have been moulded after the same fashion, and whose associations run in similar channels. Such correspondence of thought and feeling is required, not merely that the terms used may be understood in the same sense, but also that the mind of the reader may be able to furnish at once those connecting and accessory ideas, that perpetual commentary on the words employed, which is necessary to supply the many breaks and deficiencies of expression, that have their origin in the unavoidable imperfection of language. In order to receive from the words of an ancient writer the meaning and impression which they were once adapted to convey, we must often arrange our thoughts in new combinations, form new conceptions, and refashion others, regard subjects under an aspect foreign from that to which we are accustomed, and restore associations that have long been obsolete. We must forget our present knowledge and belief ; and place ourselves in the midst of the imperfect information and the erroneous views by which he was surrounded. If this be not done, we may substitute for his speculations an incongruous sort of modern-antique doctrine ; and may praise or censure him, equally without reason, for the

supposititious opinions we have ascribed to him. Two writers of opposite belief may each fancy that he finds his own philosophy in an ancient author, and both may equally be in error, for both may have committed the anachronism of supposing him to have reference to conceptions which did not exist till long after his day. Some modern accounts of ancient doctrines resemble the descriptions that have been given, or have been feigned to be given, of European manners and customs by natives of the East. They are travellers' wonders. We find in them verbal truth and essential error. The ideas of the ancient writer may be so disguised as hardly to be recognised, by being divested of their native dress, clothed in new words, and presented apart from all their usual associations. We find partial views, misapprehensions, an inability to estimate what is perceived according to its relative importance, and, in consequence of all, false inferences, which, if the expositor have a theory to maintain, or fancy that he has a talent for disquisition, spread their cloudy or dazzling discoloration over the whole subject.

In studying the speculations of the ancients, we are, then, as far as possible, to keep their conceptions steadily before our minds, to refer their language directly to those conceptions, and not to interpret it to ourselves through the ill-adapted medium of modern opinions and a modern tongue. But the earnest and unrelaxed attention which is thus required is, in itself, not altogether favorable to our attaining a right apprehension of the subject of our study. This arises from the character of ancient philosophy. The difficulty of the task leads us to examine too closely and intently, theories not of a nature to be submitted to such critical scrutiny. We fix our eyes too steadily upon speculations adapted only for a general and cursory view. We expect from the author a grave feeling of the responsibility of the discussion, corresponding to the gravity of the task imposed upon ourselves; and we are likely to become far more earnest than he

was, to determine precisely his meaning, and reconcile his opinions and, perhaps, his metaphors, with each other.

Reasoning upon the higher and more important subjects of thought was a far less serious thing with the ancient heathen philosophers than it is at the present day. The whole region of knowledge that lies beyond the sphere of the senses was involved in obscurity and doubt. No great truths generally acknowledged served as landmarks to guide the explorer. The higher philosophy, therefore, of the ancient heathens, comprehending all that relates to their theology, consisted, in great part, of conjectures and doubtful hypotheses. Unable to find arguments to satisfy the understanding, they addressed themselves to the imagination. Proof of any theory could not be furnished. Uncertainty was on every side. The voice of Revelation was as yet unheard; and the assurance which we derive from it of the fundamental truths of religion was unknown. In this absence of any decided belief, men were neither accustomed to reason strictly themselves, nor to demand strict reasoning from others. What was plausible passed current, and became a substitute for truth.

In the famous dialogue, in which Plato gives an account of the creation and constitution of the universe, he represents Timæus, to whom he assigns the explanation of those subjects, as thus speaking; "Since much has been said by many concerning the gods and the production of the universe, you will not wonder if my account of these things should not be fitted in all respects to bear the strictest examination, and command universal assent. But, if I produce one not less probable than any other, it is to be received with favor; for you must remember, that he who speaks, and you who judge, are but men; so that if you receive from me a probable *mythos*, it will be well to seek no further."* A probable *mythos*, or, in other words, an imaginary representation, sup-

* Timæus, p. 29.

posed to have a semblance of the truth, was often all that was aimed at by the ancients in similar speculations. As such only, some of the more sober Gnostics may have regarded their theories concerning the spiritual world. It might be well, perhaps, especially in treating of the speculations of the ancients, to adopt the term *mythos* into our own language in one of its ancient senses, as denoting an imaginary account of unknown things or events, not supposed to be true in its details, but intended to affect the mind in the same manner as the truth.* In modern philosophy this kind of writing is not common; but there is an example of it by the celebrated author of "The Light of Nature pursued," in "The Vision," in which he describes the future life.

The art of reasoning, more slow in its progress than any other, was very imperfectly understood by the ancients. In every branch of philosophy, not less than in the physical sciences, they committed the mistake of founding their hypotheses on preconceptions and not on facts. As regards the physical sciences, their imaginary and false speculations are now only a matter of history. But they were far more exposed to error in treating of objects beyond the sphere of the senses, than in explaining the phenomena of the material world. When, with our very different and more correct modes of thinking, we now study their theories, it is like freely examining in the daytime a spectacle adapted to be viewed only at a distance by artificial light. To explain the appearances observed by them, instead of investigating the laws of matter and mind, and the relations of existing things to each other, they passed beyond the bounds of human knowledge, and supposed the operation of agencies, beings, and qualities, of the existence of which no proof had been or could be produced. Thus, to explain the origin of the world,

* The modernized term *myth* (English), or *mythe* (French and German), has been lately introduced; but it has been used so vaguely as to be rather a disadvantage than a gain as regards precision of language.

the Epicureans fancied an infinity of atoms for ever falling through void space, with a slight inclination towards each other, and for ever forming numberless combinations, of which this universe was one. To account for the changes in the qualities of material objects, Plato taught, that, from eternity, these qualities had possessed existence as *Ideas*, and that they sometimes were connected with and sometimes separated from the same portion of primitive matter; the disappearance of one Idea, or quality, being followed by the access of another. The existence of evil was, as we have seen, explained by the supposition of an evil nature inherent in eternal, uncreated matter, the necessary substratum of the visible universe. In the common intercourse of life every one may meet with undisciplined thinkers, of active minds, who are accustomed to frame theories after the same fashion. As I have said, their defect is, that they assume the operation of causes, or laws, of the existence of which there is neither proof nor probability; and it may be added, that this assumption is often connected with mistakes in regard to the character of the phenomena to be explained. Even in modern times this sort of reasoning, after having been partially, at least, driven from the physical sciences, has maintained its ground in the higher departments of philosophy. We have examples of it in the *monads* and *preëstablished harmony* of Leibnitz; in the necessary scale of being *from Infinite to man, from man to nothing*, which Bolingbroke imposed on the good sense of Pope; in Hartley's theory of *vibrations*, and the conversion of *vibratiuncles* into complex and abstract ideas; in Priestley's doctrine of the materiality of the soul, connected by him with the position, that matter has no other properties than those of attraction, repulsion, and extension; in the speculations of Darwin in his *Zoönomia*; and throughout the writings of the modern German metaphysicians.

When such conjectural hypotheses find favor, they will be multiplied abundantly; for they are of easy construction.

They require no patient investigation of facts, no analysis nor induction. Nor, as they involve conceptions beyond the sphere of experience, do they admit of those precise definitions of thought, which are incompatible with error, and which only a superior intellect can combine into new forms of truth. The theorist passes at once from the world of reality into the world of imagination, the transcendental world, where he may fabricate and put together his materials at pleasure. Whatever phenomena present themselves, if he have sufficient ingenuity, he needs to be at no loss for an explanation. As in the Ptolemaic system of the world, with its *centrics and excentrics, cycles and epicycles, orb in orb*, he may by new additions always contrive to keep his hypothesis in repair, till it falls to pieces at the shock of truth. We are apt, indeed, through a natural mistake, to infer from the difficulty that we may find in understanding such speculations that they are difficult of fabrication. If we suffer ourselves to be deceived by the pretensions of a writer, we may fancy that he thinks profoundly, when he is only so indistinct, confused, and illogical, that we cannot fathom his meaning. But truth is always clear. Good sense is always intelligible. Obscurity is the birth-place and the lurking-hole of error. We can make no progress in the investigation of truth, if our ideas are vague and unformed. We might as well attempt to determine the phenomena of the heavenly bodies by observations taken in a mist. The first requisite in a philosopher is, that he apprehend his own meaning; and if he do so, he can hardly fail to make his meaning understood. Other things being equal, a writer deserves to be read in proportion as he is intelligible; that is, in proportion as his ideas are definite, clear, and rightly disposed in their relations to each other.

If obscurity were an indication of wisdom, the theosophic Gnostics might be reckoned among the wisest of thinkers. We need not doubt, however, that there were many among them, who fancied that they understood the speculations of their school. They whose minds are confused, and who are

unaccustomed to look for a precise meaning in words, often readily believe that they comprehend what is unintelligible. Wanting sagacity to discern the indefiniteness or the inconsistency of ideas, they are satisfied with words that present a semblance of meaning. At the same time, as was the case with the Gnostics, their vanity may be flattered by the thought that they can understand what wiser men cannot; and they may, in consequence, admire the writer who affords them this gratification. In the incantations of former times, barbarous and unmeaning words were used to compel the spirits evoked; and the history of our race, and our own observation, may attest the magical power of nonsense over the spirits of men.

In proportion as we think inaccurately and reason illogically, in proportion as we neglect to define our conceptions, and trace out their relations, and discover their mutual bearings, so will our notions, both concerning different subjects, and concerning the same subject as viewed in various connections, be irreconcilable with each other. It is, I conceive, impossible, and if possible it must be the labor of severe and long-continued thought, to detect all the inconsistencies of our ideas, and reduce all our opinions to a uniform system of belief. It is a task which the ancient philosophers did not attempt to perform. Their metaphysical speculations had more alliance with poetry than with reasoning. Often the conceptions presented by them were adapted to the purpose in view, with little regard to those which they might elsewhere express. Hence much unprofitable labor has been spent in endeavouring to bend their language to such a meaning, that the different doctrines of the same individual, or the same sect, may not appear altogether incongruous with each other. Some of their modern expositors have been far more concerned than they were, to render their philosophy consistent with itself. When such an account is given of the general system of opinions of an ancient theorist, as puts

them in competition with those of a true philosopher; or when such an account is given, that we do not at once perceive great oversights and deficiencies, this very circumstance affords reason to distrust its correctness. There is ground to suspect, that the doctrines of the ancient theorist have been refashioned by his modern expositor. It is often much easier to fabricate a scheme of opinions to which the language of an ancient writer approximates, or to which many of his expressions may be conformed,—an imaginary theory which he did not hold, but which, if he had thought consistently, he might perhaps have held,—than to determine and explain the real state of his conceptions at different times, and the varying senses of the same words as employed by him in different connections.

Truth, in respect to the higher objects of thought, was of much less importance in ancient times than in our own. It was of less importance, because, even if attained, it could have little influence on the generality of men. The free use of books being confined to, comparatively, a very small number, and all other means of communicating the opinions and sentiments of enlightened men being scanty and imperfect, it could not be widely promulgated; and, so far as it was promulgated, it must appeal to arguments that but few would understand, and urge considerations that but few would feel. The express authority of revelation alone affords a firm and sufficient basis for those truths which most concern human happiness and virtue. The most excellent speculations of ancient philosophers, though they tended without doubt to give a higher elevation to a few superior minds,—who, through a very natural, but very great mistake, may now appear to us as the representatives of the ancient world,—yet affected in no considerable degree the moral condition of the generality of men. Truth, therefore, being pursued with little view to any practical result, was not sought for intently, nor with strong interest. No ancient philosopher

appears to have thought more like a wise and good man of modern times, than Cicero ; and in some of his writings there is a moral grandeur and power, that no modern eloquence has surpassed. In his work, "Concerning the Nature of the Gods," "that most difficult," he says, "and most obscure question," he begins with stating its importance in the strong language of a religious philosopher. "Were piety toward the gods done away, I do not know," he says, "but that mutual trust, and all that binds men together in society, and that regard to the rights of others, which stands alone as the most excellent of virtues, would also come to an end." Yet he concludes this work with stating, in the person of Cotta, the objections to any divine providence, urged by the disciples of the new Academy, and leaves them not merely unanswered, but without attempting to weaken their force, except by a declaration, that he thought the opposite opinion more probable. They were such objections, we may suppose, as had pressed upon his own mind, though without overthrowing his religious faith ; and such a statement of them, even coming from him, was not likely, as he knew, to produce any perceptible effect on the popular belief.

The loose reasoning of the ancients proceeded in great part from the want of clear conceptions ; and consequently the signification of the language employed in it was fluctuating and indeterminate. Many of the principal terms in ancient philosophy have but a dim and uncertain meaning. The conception meant to be expressed by a particular name embraces perhaps incongruous ideas, of which the attention, as it is differently directed, is now fixed upon one, and then upon another. As in the mechanical arts, the tools of the workman become more finished, and are better adapted to their purpose, in proportion to the progress of those arts, so it is, in the art of reasoning, with words, the tools of the logician. They become more clear and definite in their signification as men think and reason more distinctly and accurately.

But in proportion as any period, or any school, is characterized by loose reasoning, and cloudy and uncertain language, we may expect to find it distinguished also by the number of its philosophical theories, and the fancied subtilty and sublimity of its speculations. The fog that is spread around changes the appearance of familiar objects; it magnifies their forms and blends with them its own unsubstantial shapes. The whole aspect of nature is different from that presented in a clear light; and he who describes, as really existing, what he has fancied himself to behold under this delusion, may be untelligible to one who sees things as they are. In some of the works of the mystical metaphysicians of the present day, we may find as striking examples as any which antiquity affords, of general terms, floating loosely through a wide sphere of meaning, and incapable of being fixed in any definite sense; of language, deprived of all real import, and presenting only spectral and unformed conceptions; and of new and barbarous words, the signification of which has neither been settled by usage, that best definer of language, nor analyzed and explained by the inventor.

There is still another consideration to be attended to concerning the speculations of the ancient philosophers. When men's ideas are unformed and their language indefinite, those who attempt to speculate necessarily speculate obscurely. Having but a partial and unsteady view of the objects to which their attention is directed, they express themselves with an indistinctness that may conceal error; in figurative language between which and what is literally intended more or less correspondence may be supposed; or with a wide generality of phrase that leaves their meaning indeterminate,—a matter of controversy to be settled according to the different judgments of their disciples. Hence the sayings of those who were, or who were reputed, wise, in the earlier stages of intellectual cultivation, acquired the name of “dark sayings;” and enigmatic language, and imperfect modes of expression, by

which nothing was clearly explained, came to be considered as the appropriate dialect of philosophy. Thus a great fault was regarded as a badge of intellectual eminence. Obscurity was thought to be characteristic of profoundness. The incapacity which could not attain to clear ideas wrapped itself in dark robes, and spoke oracles in paradoxes and ambiguous language.

The causes which produced this state of things have continued to operate, more or less, through the whole progress of philosophy. The alchymists and astrologers of former times used a peculiar *gergo*, or cant language, intelligible only to themselves; and other professors of false philosophy have, like them, sought to distinguish themselves from the generality by peculiar modes of speech, and the misuse of language. During the age of the Gnostics, those conceptions which have led to the affectation of obscurity were in full strength. We find them expressed and defended by Clement of Alexandria; and a few sentences from that eminent father may cast some further light on the subject.

“All those,” he says, “who have theologized, both Barbarians and Greeks, have concealed the principles of things; and have delivered the truth in enigmas and symbols, in allegories and metaphors, and in such modes of expression.”*

Elsewhere he gives the reasons for adopting this style of teaching.

“Life would fail me, should I undertake to enumerate all those who have philosophized symbolically, for the sake of assisting the memory by brevity, and in order to excite attention to the truth. . . . All truths shown under a veil appear greater and more venerable; beautiful, like fruits seen through water, or forms that discover their lineaments under drapery. For a blaze of light shows defects. Beside, what is plainly seen can be understood but in one sense; but truths should admit of diverse acceptations, as they do when expressed obscurely. When they are so expressed, the un-

* Stromat. v. § 4. p. 658.

skilled and ignorant man falls into error, but the enlightened man* comprehends them. The wise have not been willing that all things should be free to all; nor that the treasures of wisdom should be communicated to those who have not even dreamed of purifying their souls. For it is not right to bestow on every one what has been acquired with so much labor, nor to expound the mysteries of the Logos [of Wisdom] to the profane. It is related that Hipparchus, the Pythagorean, being charged with explaining clearly in his writings the doctrines of Pythagoras, was expelled from the school, and that a monumental pillar was erected to him as if he had been dead.”†

Clement has much more to the same effect in the fifth book of his *Stromata*.‡ In support of his doctrine he refers to many real or supposed examples and authorities. Clement himself, however, is not distinguished, as a writer, for *studied* obscurity, nor did his doctrine prevail among catholic Christians. But, in the passages quoted from him, he is to be considered as the representative of a class, and as expressing opinions common in his age.

In treating of this subject in the fifth book of his *Stromata*, it seems evident that the hidden wisdom which he principally had in mind consisted in speculations relating to the nature of the Divinity, “the sacred mystic doctrine,” as he expresses it, “concerning the Unoriginated and his Powers.”§ It was the subject about which the theosophic Gnostics especially exercised their imaginations. Clement introduces the ancient doctrine respecting obscurity in various other places, and particularly dwells upon it again in the sixth book of his *Stromata*.|| Elsewhere, after maintaining a common notion of the fathers, that the heathen philosophers borrowed much

* ‘Ο γνωστικός, “The Gnostic.” See before pp. 4, 5.

† *Stromat.* v. § 9. pp. 679, 680.

‡ From p. 656 to p. 694.

§ *Stromat.* v. p. 694. *Conf.* pp. 685, 686; 689, 690; 692, seqq. *Stromat.* vii. p. 838.

|| From p. 798 to p. 817.

from the Jewish Scriptures, he represents them as imitating from those Scriptures, "the hidden character of the barbaric [the Jewish] philosophy, its symbolical and enigmatical form, which is most useful, or rather most necessary, to a knowledge of the truth."*

It is easy to understand what must have been the consequences of such an opinion of the excellence of obscurity. He who does not study clearness in the use of words cannot think clearly; for, as regards all abstract subjects, words are not merely the means by which we express ourselves, they are also the means by which we think. We can no more reason on such subjects with a confused notion of their significance, than we can pursue an investigation in the higher branches of mathematics with a confused notion of the significance of the symbols to be employed. But, when obscurity becomes a subject of praise, or when the great mistake is made of supposing it not to be the natural result of incapacity, but to be in some way connected with superiority of mind, there will be many pretended teachers of wisdom, who will pour forth their imperfect and incoherent ideas, leaving it to their admirers to find or to imagine a meaning.

The preceding remarks may prepare us for the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics concerning the origin of spiritual beings, and of the material universe. But a single example from an ancient writer will serve to illustrate what has been said, and to give a more distinct view of ancient philosophy. I will produce one from Plato, "that wisest man of Greece," says Cicero, "far excelling all others in knowledge." It is the account which he gives in his *Timæus* of the formation of the Soul of the Universe;† a famous passage, about which much was written in ancient times. The subject, it will be perceived, has an analogy to that of the speculations of the Gnostics.

* *Stromat.* v. § 1. p. 429.

† *Timæus*, pp. 35, 36.

"The Divinity," says Plato, "compounded the Soul of the Universe of the following materials in the following manner. Of that substance which is undivided and always the same [the substance of things *intelligible*],* and of that which becomes divided in the formation of bodies [*primitive matter*],† he compounded a third kind of substance [matter indued with qualities],‡ intermediate between both, partaking of the nature both of the *Uniform* and the *Different*;§ and accordingly placed it in the midst between that which is with-

* "Of things *intelligible*;" that is, of such as can be discerned by the intellect alone; the opposite of things *sensible*. Vid. *Timæus*, pp. 27-29; p. 48; pp. 51, 52. *Phædo*, p. 78, seqq. *Sophista*, p. 248. *Politicus*, p. 269.

† "*Primitive matter*;" that is, matter supposed to exist without qualities, as the mere substratum or recipient of qualities. Vid. *Timæus*, pp. 48-51. See Additional Note, E.

‡ What is meant by the third kind of substance is to be inferred from a doctrine fundamental in Plato's philosophy, that the union of things intelligible, that is, of *Ideas*, with primitive matter, produces the forms of matter perceptible by the senses. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to observe, that the word "substance" (*οὐσία*) as used above must be taken in its widest acceptation, as denoting "whatever exists, not as the accident of any thing else."

§ *Τῆς τε ταύτου φύσεως αὖ περὶ καὶ τῆς θατέρου*, "of the nature both of the *Uniform* and the *Different*." The words *ταύτην* and *θατέραν* have commonly been rendered *Idem* and *Diversum*, "the Same" and "the Diverse" or "Different;" but this rendering conveys no clear ideas. It is evident that by those terms are respectively meant the two substances first mentioned; but I think no satisfactory explanation has been given, either in ancient or modern times, of the sense in which they are applied to those substances. But by "the substance which is always the same," (a description which, with a little variation of phrase, repeatedly occurs in Plato, as in "the Sophist," p. 248, and "the Statesman," p. 269,) is evidently meant by him the substance which is always the same with itself, that is, which is always "uniform." By *θατέραν* may then be meant the substance which is "different" from that which is always uniform, or "the other" of the only two original kinds of substance. However this may be, the names I have used, "the Uniform" and "the Different," sufficiently express the nature of the substances intended. Plato, here as elsewhere, evidently affects obscurity.—I do not perceive that any light is thrown on his use of the terms in this passage by his discussion in "the Sophist" (p. 254, seqq.) concerning "*τό τε ταύτην καὶ θατέραν*," the terms being there used to denote "the Same" and "the Different," considered as two of the most universal *Ideas*. If I mistake not, a comparison of the use of the terms in the passage just referred to, with their use in the *Timæus*, only serves to show the confusion that existed in the philosophical conceptions and language of Plato.

out parts and that which is divided in bodies. Then taking these three he mingled them together, so that the whole had one new form ; forcing the nature of the *Different*, which was hard to be blended, into connection with the *Uniform*, and mixing them with the third kind of substance,* so as of the three to form one. Then he divided the whole into as many portions as were proper, each portion being a mixture of the *Uniform*, the *Different*, and the third kind of substance. He began to divide thus: he took first one portion from the whole ; afterwards he took the double of the same ; next a third, sesquialter of the second and triple of the first ; a fourth, the double of the second ; a fifth, the triple of the third ; a sixth, eight times the first ; and a seventh, twenty-seven times the first.† Afterwards he filled up the double and triple intervals, still taking portions from the same, and placing them in those intervals, so that in each interval there should be two means ; the one mean exceeding one of its extremes by a certain part of that extreme, and exceeded by the other by the same part of this other ; the other mean exceeding one extreme and exceeded by the other by the same number.‡ Thus sesquialter, sesqui-

* “ Mixing them with *the third kind of substance* ;” verbally, “ Mixing them with *the substance* ;” *μυγνὺς δὲ μετὰ τῆς οὐσίας*. By *ἡ οὐσία*, as here used, there can be no question, that the third kind of substance is meant ; though, as two other kinds of substance had been mentioned before, the use of the article without any more definite reference produces a verbal ambiguity.

† These portions correspond to the following numbers ;

1. 2. 3. 4. 9. 8. 27.

‡ The first proportion mentioned is what is called *harmonic*. It appears, for example, in the numbers, 6. 8. 12 ; as 8 exceeds 6 by one-third of 6, and 12 exceeds 8 by one-third of 12. The second proportion, it will be perceived, is arithmetical. The intervals to be filled correspond to those of the numbers mentioned in the last note. The double intervals are those in the series, 1. 2. 4. 8. The triple are those in the series, 1. 3. 9. 27. By supplying means in harmonic proportion for the double intervals we have the series ;

1. $1\frac{1}{2}$. 2. $2\frac{1}{2}$. 4. $5\frac{1}{2}$. 8.

The arithmetical means of the double intervals will be as follows ;

1. $1\frac{1}{2}$. 2. 3. 4. 6. 8.

The harmonic means of the triple intervals will stand thus ;

1. $1\frac{1}{2}$. 3. $4\frac{1}{2}$. 9. $13\frac{1}{2}$. 27.

tertian, and sesquioctave intervals being produced by these connecting links between the intervals first mentioned, he filled up all the sesquitercian intervals with intervals of a sesquioctave ; leaving a portion of each sesquitercian bounded by limits which have to each other the relation of the numbers 256 and 243.* Thus the mixture from which he divided these

The arithmetical, thus ;

1. 2. 3. 6. 9. 18. 27.

Then inserting both the harmonic and arithmetical means, the series of double intervals will be thus supplied ;

1. $1\frac{1}{2}$. $1\frac{1}{3}$. 2. $2\frac{2}{3}$. 3. 4. $5\frac{1}{2}$. 6. 8.

The series of triple intervals, thus ;

1. $1\frac{1}{3}$. 2. 3. $4\frac{1}{2}$. 6. 9. $13\frac{1}{2}$. 18. 27.

* The sesquitercian intervals are those in the two series last given which intervene between the following numbers ;

1 and $1\frac{1}{2}$. $1\frac{1}{2}$ and 2. 2 and $2\frac{2}{3}$. 3 and 4. 4 and $5\frac{1}{2}$. $4\frac{1}{2}$ and 6. 6 and 8. $13\frac{1}{2}$ and 18.

These are severally to be supplied with sesquioctave intervals, thus ;

1. $1\frac{1}{8}$. $1\frac{1}{4}$. $1\frac{1}{2}$. $1\frac{3}{4}$. $2\frac{1}{2}$. $2\frac{3}{4}$. $3\frac{1}{2}$. $3\frac{3}{4}$.
2. $2\frac{1}{4}$. $2\frac{1}{2}$. $2\frac{3}{4}$. 3. $3\frac{1}{2}$. $3\frac{3}{4}$. 4.

and so on.

But when the sesquitercian intervals are thus filled, a portion of each is left between the last sesquioctave and the greater extreme, and the greater extreme has to the sesquioctave the ratio of 256 to 243. Thus $1\frac{1}{2}$ is to $1\frac{1}{4}$ as 256 to 243.

What, then, was the purpose of Plato in giving all these numbers and proportions ? The answer is, that these numbers, thus proportioned to each other, are expressive of musical intervals, or, in other words, they are what are called *musical numbers*. This will appear clearly by multiplying them severally by 768, so as to avoid the fractions, as in the following table ;

1	$1\frac{1}{8}$	$1\frac{1}{4}$	$1\frac{1}{2}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$
768	864	972	1024	1152	1296	1458
2	$2\frac{1}{4}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$	3	$3\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{3}{4}$
1536	1728	1944	2048	2304	2592	2916
						3072.

and so on.

The numbers produced by this multiplication may be found in the Table of Musical Numbers in Rees's Cyclopædia (Article, *Music*), as far as to 2048 ; and the higher numbers, and those to be produced by a further multiplication, may be obtained by the rule there given.

It was reported of Pythagoras, many centuries after his death, that he first discovered the ratios of the musical intervals, in his investigations respecting the sounds produced by the heavenly bodies in their motions. According to Macrobius (In Somnium Scipionis, Lib. ii. c. 1), he found, that no musical notes were

portions was wholly used up. Then cutting the composition through lengthwise into two parts, he adjusted the middle of

in concord, unless the higher had to the lower one of the following ratios; sesquitercian, sesquialter, double, triple, quadruple, and sesquioctave. These, with the ratio of 243 to 256, are the relations between the numbers of Plato.

The ratio of 243 to 256 expresses that of the ancient musical *limma*, of which Macrobius (*ubi supra*) says, "The ancients have named a sound minor than a tone, a semitone; which, it is found, differs as little from a tone as the numbers 243 and 256 from each other. . . . This Plato calls a *limma*."

The conception, then, which is the nucleus of Plato's whole system of numbers, is simply, that the soul of the universe was formed according to the laws of harmony. This is the solution of his riddle. He might have acknowledged Dryden as his expositor:

"From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
This universal frame began;
From harmony to harmony,
Through all the compass of the notes, it ran."

"More obscure than the numbers of Plato," or "More obscure than the *Timæus* of Plato," (the true reading is doubtful,) is an expression of Cicero in one of his letters to Atticus. Tennemann, however, says, in his "System of the Platonic Philosophy" (in German, Vol. iii. p. 179, note), that "however obscure and enigmatic these Platonic numbers have been represented in ancient and modern times, yet in reality they are not so. Through an accurate acquaintance with *the theory of the Pythagoreans concerning numbers, and the astronomical knowledge of the times of Plato*, they might be explained, if it were worth the trouble." The remark is characteristic.

It is probable, that, in describing the formation of the Soul of the Universe according to the laws of harmony, Plato had in mind the Pythagorean doctrine of the harmony produced by the heavenly bodies in their revolutions;—*ille tantus et tam dulcis sonus*, which Scipio heard in his "Dream,"

" 'When' nature thundered in his opening ears,
And 'charmed' him with the music of the spheres."

But Plato himself does not attempt to explain how this music of the heavenly bodies might be produced by the structure of the Mundane Soul; nor does he indicate any relation between the two conceptions. By later writers (Chalcidius in *Timæum*, p. 313. Ed. Fabricii. Macrobius in *Somnium Scipionis*, Lib. ii. capp. 1-3.) such a relation was conceived of as existing.—It was imagined that musical sounds were produced by the impulse of the heavenly bodies upon the medium through which they moved, (Macrobius says "the air,") and that these sounds were harmonious, because the distances of those bodies from each other corresponded to musical intervals. Eratosthenes, in the second century before Christ, attempted scientifically to measure the earth. He determined its circumference to be 31,500 Roman miles (the Roman mile is to the English as 967 to 1,056). Censorinus (*De Die Natali*, c. 13) carrying back this knowledge to the

one part to that of the other in the form of the letter X, and, bending each round into a circle, he fitted them together, and to each other, opposite to the place where they were first put together, and gave them a revolving motion always uniform through the same space. And he made one of the circles exterior and the other interior. The exterior motion he appointed to be of the *uniform* nature, the interior of the *different*. That of the *Uniform* he carried round *laterally* to the right; that of the *Different*, *diameter-wise* to the left.*

time of Pythagoras, says, that Pythagoras taught that the distance of the moon from the earth was half the circumference of the earth, or 15,750 Roman miles, which (for some unexplained reason) he considered as corresponding to the interval of a tone; that Mercury was a semitone, or 7,875 miles distant from the Moon; Venus the same distance from Mercury; the Sun two tones and a semitone, or 23,625 miles from Venus, and so on; making, in the whole, the distance of the orb of the fixed stars from the earth to be 94,500 Roman miles. According to Macrobius, the Platonists, proceeding on the same principle of a reference to musical intervals, computed the distances of the heavenly bodies differently, but not more correctly.—Thus a theory was formed to explain an imaginary effect by imaginary causes, between which causes and the effect no intelligible relation could be traced.

* Plato conceived of the outer circle of the Mundane Soul as causing the daily revolution of the heavens from east to west, and of the inner circle, divided into seven parts (to be immediately mentioned above), as causing the revolution of the Sun, Moon, and planets, from west to east. In calling the west the right, and the east the left, he used a mode of speaking, the correctness of which Aristotle (De Cœlo, Lib. ii. c. 2) says was asserted by the Pythagoreans; and though Aristotle argues strenuously for an opposite use of the terms, it seems subsequently to have been common in treating of the heavens. See Philo de Cherubim. Opp. i. 142. Plinii Hist. Nat. Lib. ii. 6. 4.

Plato says that the outer circle was carried round *κατὰ πλευρὰν*, *laterally*, the inner *κατὰ διάμετρον*, which I have ventured to render *diameter-wise*. Apparently, what he intended by these indefinite words may be thus explained. He conceived of the inner circle of the soul (answering in its position to the Zodiac) as revolving in the plane of its diameters; that is, as he terms it, *κατὰ διάμετρον*, *diameter-wise*; but the outer circle, which, in his view, carried round the heavenly bodies, through every part of heaven, in their daily revolution, he conceived of as not revolving in the plane of its diameters, but as turning on an axis (the axis of the heavens) passing from north to south through its opposite sides; that is, according to his expression, as carried round *κατὰ πλευρὰν*, *laterally*.

Stallbaum, in his late elaborate edition of the Timæus, quotes a passage from Proclus, who, he says, "very clearly explains" the terms just remarked upon "from the geometrical method of philosophizing of the ancient Pythagoreans and

The superior power he gave to the periphery of the *uniform* and homogeneous nature. This he left undivided; but the interior he divided into seven unequal circles, according to the several divisions of the double and triple intervals,* there being three intervals of each kind. And he appointed the circles to move contrarywise to each other, but three with equal velocity; the other four with velocities different from each other and from that of the three, but revolving according to rule.†

Platonists." But to my apprehension the pretended explanation of Proclus is only so far intelligible, as to show that he had in mind some conception equally incoherent and irrelevant. Whatever meaning is to be discerned in the passage quoted from him, consists, to all appearance, of imaginations of his own; and I do not know on what ground the imaginations of Proclus, eight centuries after the time of Plato, are to be attributed to that philosopher. The later Platonists afford evidence for nothing concerning the philosophy of Plato but their own conceptions of it.

* The double and treble intervals are the six before mentioned. See p. 224, note †.

† The seven sections of the inner circle of the Mundane Soul are the seven orbs which Plato conceived of as carrying the heavenly bodies of our system round the earth from west to east. The distances of those bodies from the earth he supposed to be in the following order; the Moon, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; unless, perhaps, he thought Mercury nearer the earth than Venus; a point on which the opinions of the ancients were divided. The inner circle of the Soul Plato has hitherto represented as a band. How he imagined it to be so divided as to form circles, one exterior to another, does not appear.

The three circles supposed to move with the same velocity are those which are the deferents of the Sun, Mercury, and Venus; Mercury and Venus each performing its apparent revolution round the Earth in about the same time with the Sun. But it is evident, that if the orbs of Mercury and Venus are exterior to that of the Sun, and perform their revolutions in the same time with it, they must move not with the like velocity, as Plato says (*τάχει ὁμοίως*), but with greater velocity. He also describes the seven sections of the inner circle as moving contrarywise to each other (*κατὰ τὰναντία μὲν ἀλλήλοις*); but it is equally clear, that circles all moving from west to east cannot move contrarywise to each other.

The contradiction of ideas, which represent circles of different diameters as performing their revolutions in the same time with the same velocity, does not admit of any management by which it may be veiled. The most we can do is to account for its appearance by a reference to the fact, that Plato had in mind the apparent motion of the three heavenly bodies of which he conceived those circles to be the deferents. The case is the same with his representation, that the seven circles which are deferents of the seven heavenly bodies all move from west to east, and

"But after the whole structure of the soul was completed agreeably to the mind of him who framed it, he then fashioned

at the same time move contrarywise to each other. This, likewise, is to be accounted for only by supposing that he confounded the deferents of the heavenly bodies with the heavenly bodies themselves, and referred to the apparent motions of the latter. Of this there is no hint in the passage before us; but that such was the fact appears from another passage a few pages after; which, however, if it throw some light,—not on the meaning of Plato's words, for that cannot be, but on the conception in his mind when he wrote those words,—yet brings also a new access of darkness. Plato there says (pp. 38, 39), that Venus and Mercury perform their courses with the same velocity as the Sun, but "possess a power contrary to it (*τὴν δ' ἐναντίαν εἰληχότες αὐτῷ δύναμιν*); whence the Sun, Mercury, and Venus, overtake and are overtaken by one another in turn." The Sun, Moon, and planets, he says, "are borne along by the oblique motion of the *Different* [the motion from west to east], passing through and controlled by the motion of the *Uniform* [the motion from east to west]; some describing greater and others lesser circles; the latter bodies revolving more swiftly, and the former more slowly. But in consequence of the motion of the *Uniform*, those which revolve most swiftly, when they overtake those which revolve more slowly, appear to be overtaken by them; for this motion bends all their circles into spirals, in consequence of their moving under the action of two contrary forces, and thus causes that body which recedes most slowly from it, this being the swiftest motion, to appear nearest to it."

Stallbaum gives, in a note, a translation of the latter part of this passage, in which he aggravates its character by the mistake of substituting "the motion of the *Different*" for the "motion of the *Uniform*," as that which bends the courses of the heavenly bodies spirally, and "causes that body which recedes most slowly from it, this being the swiftest motion, to appear nearest to it." He then subjoins; *Quæ quomodo intelligi debeant, certè nullâ indiget explicatione*; "How this is to be understood certainly needs no explanation." There is an error of one word in this remark. Instead of "needs" he should have said "admits."

Some fragments of meaning, however, may, I think, be discovered in the words of Plato himself. In consequence of "the motion of the *Uniform*," he says, "those bodies which revolve most swiftly, when they overtake those which revolve more slowly, appear to be overtaken by them." Apparently, he here refers to the fact, that if one of the heavenly bodies of our system have a more rapid apparent motion to the east than another, then, viewed in reference to their daily revolution, the slower will appear to be gaining on the swifter. Having been to the east of it, it will appear to the west; and thus the slower, having first followed the swifter in its daily course, will afterwards rise, arrive at the meridian, and set before it.—The imagination of the courses of the heavenly bodies being rendered spiral by the contrary forces of "the *Uniform*" and "the *Different*," is in itself intelligible, but has no relation to the fact just mentioned, with which Plato has connected it. It appears to be an attempt to account for the retrograde motion of the planets; and, if so, it is as plausible a theory as that of Pliny (Hist. Nat. Lib. ii. c. 13),

the corporeal universe within it, and, adjusting the middle of one to that of the other, fitted them together. Thus the Soul,

who ascribes this motion to the percussion of the rays of the Sun, striking the planets in certain parts of their orbits in a particular direction.—In the conclusion of the sentence it is said that the motion of the *Uniform* “causes that body which recedes most slowly from it, this being the swiftest motion, to appear nearest to it;” and this remark is intended to explain, why, among heavenly bodies, the slower appear to overtake the swifter. Plato, as we have seen, conceived of the motion of the *Uniform*, or, rather, of the cause of this motion, as residing in that circle of the Mundane Soul, which, extending from north to south, revolves from east to west, and becomes in its daily revolution coincident with every meridian. When he speaks of the nearness of a body to the motion of the *Uniform*, it would seem that he must mean its nearness to that circle. The proposition which he makes, being in effect, that the body which recedes most slowly from it will appear nearest to it, is virtually an identical proposition. But, perhaps, what he had in mind was, that the slower body, having been passed by a swifter, while both are receding to the east from the circle of the *Uniform*, would remain nearer to that circle, and would consequently arrive at the meridian sooner, and would thus, as before explained, appear to have overtaken the swifter body in their daily revolution.

I have seen a reference to a passage of the *Epinomis*, as showing that Plato “had a distinct acquaintance with the general character of the planetary motions.” But the *Epinomis* was probably, not a work of Plato, but of a much inferior author; and the passage (p. 986, seqq.) is of no interest. It affords proof only of what, even in the time of the writer, must have been considered as the most elementary astronomical knowledge. The account of the planetary motions which I have formerly quoted (see before, p. 182) from the seventh book of the “*Laws*” may, perhaps, be reconciled, at least verbally, with that given in the *Timæus*, which we have been considering. In the tenth book of his *Republic* (pp. 616, 617) Plato gives another account of the astronomical system of the universe under the form of an allegory. But it has ever been the despair of his commentators. The glimpses of meaning that appear are rarer and fainter and more confused, than those we have been following.

There is still another remarkable fact respecting the astronomical speculations of Plato. Notwithstanding that in the passage quoted above he ascribes a diurnal revolution to the heavens, yet it has been supposed that in another passage, which follows at no great distance (p. 40), he ascribes a diurnal revolution to the Earth. Whether he do so or not, has been a matter of doubt and controversy from his own time. The decision of the question depends ultimately on the meaning which he intended to give to an ambiguous word. He says; “But the Earth, our nurse, *rolling round* (or *conglobed round*, *εἰλλομένην*) the axis of the Universe, he (the Creator) formed to be the maker and preserver of day and night.” The last clause favors the supposition, that he *here* meant to ascribe to the Earth a daily revolution, though it may be otherwise explained. But, whatever were his meaning, he was understood as asserting, in this passage, the revolution of the Earth by his

interwoven in every part of it from the centre to the furthest heaven, and circumfused around it, and revolving by its own

disciple Aristotle. (De Cœlo, Lib. ii. capp. 13, 14.) He is said to have held this opinion by the historian of ancient philosophers, Diogenes Laertius. (Lib. iii. § 75.) And Cicero, after mentioning the theory, that the heavens *do not revolve*, but that their apparent revolution is caused by that of the Earth, says, that "some think that Plato has taught this in his *Timæus*, but rather obscurely." (Academic. Quæst. Lib. iv. § 39.) Nothing can more evidently show the confusion and obscurity with which Plato expressed himself, and consequently the confusion and incoherence of his ideas, than the question which existed, Whether he did or did not virtually contradict himself in the compass of a few pages; and the opinion asserted or suggested by the three writers whom I have mentioned, that such was the case. It is, at the same time, well deserving of remark, that no one of those writers takes any notice of the obvious inconsistency of the supposed meaning of the passage in question with what Plato elsewhere plainly asserts.

On Plato's allegorical exposition of the universe, before referred to, in the tenth book of the Republic, one of his most intelligent, and judicious translators, M. Grou, makes the following tolerant observation; "We must not here look for astronomical precision and exactness. In narrations of this kind, which Plato employs from time to time to embellish his dialogues, he indulges much in imagination; it is his object rather to please by poetical images, than to say what is true."

But the essential foundation of all beauty in allegories, and in all poetical conceptions, is conformity to truth, actual or possible. An allegory which does not correspond to a real or conceivable state of things is but a pretended riddle without meaning.

The mind of Plato was mystical,—often conversant with unformed and incongruous conceptions, incapable of being definitely apprehended, which, as is the tendency of such minds, he mistook for important truths. Those conceptions he was naturally led to hide from too close examination by the use of terms in very loose and changeable senses, and by oracular and imperfect modes of expression to which no intelligible and consistent meaning can be assigned. What, however, might now be fairly ascribed to incapacity in the writer, is to be accounted for in Plato by the imperfect state of human knowledge in his time, and by the little progress that mankind had made in forming and defining abstract ideas, and in settling the significance of the language by which they are expressed. He was an explorer in new fields of speculation. His views were wide; he opened many subjects, and he is fertile in thoughts and imaginations. But his discussions are often unsatisfactory and evasive. He rarely explains himself clearly and fully. In attempting to be profound he becomes confused and obscure. A great part of his reasoning consists in the deceptive management of words, sometimes amusing from the dexterity with which it is performed, sometimes perplexing from the difficulty of understanding him, or, perhaps, from the difficulty of solving the puzzle which he propounds, but as often wearisome from its want of all real meaning or force. The time had not come when the questions which he raises could be properly treated. His morality is sometimes false from being over-

motion, entered upon the divine commencement of a life always in action, full of intelligence, to continue for ever."

It is unnecessary to show how unsubstantial is this phantom of a theory, and how slightly it is connected with any truth whatever. All is assumption without proof; reasoning is out of the question; it is a mere work of imagination; and the same character belongs generally to the dialogue in which it is found, as well as to much else that has been left us by Plato. In the speculations of Ptolemy the Valentinian, to which we are about to turn ("*quidquid male feriatum caput parturire potuit deliriorum*," as they are called by a modern expositor of them),* there is nothing more unsupported by proof, or more remote from modern conceptions, than in some of those of the Athenian philosopher; on which, indeed, they were in great part founded. The early Christian writers, both catholic and heretic, have been treated unfairly in being separated from their predecessors and contemporaries, brought before the bar of modern criticism, and condemned for their violation of laws of thinking and reasoning which were unknown to their age, and which the most celebrated of heathen philosophers regarded as little as they.

strained, and sometimes, which was in part the fault of his age, grossly defective. Were it that of a modern writer in a Christian country, even this censure would be far too mild. His notions of religion, as may be supposed, were very imperfect. But, however great may be the deductions to be made from his character as a moral and religious teacher, yet his peculiar distinction consists in the high conceptions of morality and religion to which he often attained, and which he forcibly expresses. These charm us; and excite our wonder from their contrast with what was around him. It was, we may believe, the noble tone of sentiment sounding forth from his writings, that kindled the enthusiasm of Cicero; "Sequar igitur," he says, in commencing the third book of his own work on Laws, "Sequar igitur, ut institui, divinum illum virum; quem quadam admiratione commotus sæpius fortasse laudo quam necesse est." With this characteristic, Plato combined, as I have said, great fertility of mind, a style which, viewed, perhaps, relatively to that of other philosophers, was the admiration of antiquity, though some of its defects were recognized (as by Dionysius of Halicarnassus), and much of an artist's skill in the disposition and portraiture of the circumstances and characters of his dialogues.

* Massuet, in his first Dissertation on Irenæus, § 11. p. 5.

“Non magis licuit Valentino,” says Le Clerc,* *“ex Ideis Personas facere, quam Platoni, et vulgaria prorsus aut etiam absurda caligine involvere, ut mira viderentur, nec expendi a quovis possent.”*—“Valentinus had no more right than Plato to transform Ideas into persons, and to involve trivialities and even absurdities in obscurity, in order to make them appear something wonderful, and to prevent ordinary men from passing judgment upon them.” It is true that Valentinus had no more right to do so than Plato; but, perhaps, he had more excuse for doing so, since it would be idle to compare his intellectual powers with those of the Athenian philosopher. But the meaning of Le Clerc does not, I conceive, lie on the surface. What he principally meant to express was, without doubt, the implication, that there are speculations of Plato as extravagant and unfounded as those of the Valentinians.

It is to be remarked, that the greater part of the passage which has been quoted from Plato relates to ideas of sensible objects, or to mathematical ideas;—to ideas in the conception of which absolute precision is easily attainable. The ideas of figures, lines, and motions are, in their own nature, perfectly definite. The case is wholly different with the abstract and complex ideas which belong to moral and metaphysical science. They have no external standard to which they may be referred. It requires great perspicacity to trace their outlines precisely, and to determine what should and what should not enter into their composition. Much watchfulness is necessary to preserve these shadowy abstractions, and artificial combinations of thought, unchanged during a process of investigation. Men often give the same name to conceptions which are essentially different, but have an illusory semblance of each other. When, therefore, we find a writer confused and self-contradictory in treating what relates to physical and mathematical science, we may be assured that the same characteristics will exist in his moral and metaphysical discussions. If there is much incoherence in Plato's

* Hist. Eccles. duorum priorum Sæculorum. An. 121. § 7. not. 20. p. 583.

attempt to give an astronomical account of the system of the heavens, we cannot expect to find him more clear and satisfactory when he undertakes to treat of the *intelligible* world.

I have particularly adverted to Plato in this connection, because the speculations of the Gnostics were intimately allied to the Platonic philosophy, either as it existed in the writings of its founder, or as it had been modified by his followers. Plato's influence was, also, great over the minds of the catholic Christians; and much that they connected with their Christian faith was derived either immediately from him or from his representative, Philo. Nor is it difficult to account for his ascendancy. Whatever may have been his defects or inconsistencies, he had approximated nearer than any other of the ancient Greek philosophers to moral and religious truth, that is, to the doctrines of Christianity. If he had not maintained the truths which he asserted by any great cogency of reasoning, he had illustrated them by the splendor of his genius. Developing and enlarging the conceptions which he had derived from Socrates, he was, as I have before observed, the great theological philosopher of heathen antiquity. No other heathen writer had like him insisted on the connection between morals and religion. He had taught that there was a divine moral government over the world, in reference to which life should be regulated and the character formed. He had inculcated a constant regard to the well-being of the thinking principle in man, the immortal soul, which might be raised to companionship with gods, or degraded to animate a brute; which might be made happy or miserable hereafter,—miserable by yielding to the appetites and passions, or happy by a life of philosophy and virtue.* It is not strange, therefore, that the writings of

* It is, however, important to be observed, that Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul was essentially different from the Christian doctrine of the *personal* immortality of men. It was connected with the belief of the preëxistence of souls from the commencement of the universe, and of their frequent transmigration into different bodies of men and of inferior animals. With the belief of the preëxistence of the soul through a past duration, eternal or unde-

Plato should have been highly esteemed by many of the fathers; or that, among the forms of philosophy which the age presented, that derived from him should have particularly recommended itself to the early Christians.

finer, the belief of its future immortality, so far as it was held by any of the ancient heathens, seems to have been universally connected. It was also connected commonly, almost universally, with a belief in the transmigration of the soul. It was the prevailing doctrine of Plato, that, with the exception of some souls, who were fixed in a state of happiness or suffering by having become highly purified or greatly depraved, all those originally created, whose number was subsequently neither increased nor diminished, were continually animating in succession different bodies, and forming different beings. At the same time, he taught that men, whose souls fell into neither of the two classes just mentioned, retained their personality for a certain period after death, during which they were rewarded or punished for their good or evil lives. When this period was finished their souls returned to earth to constitute different individuals. From the region of the living there was a constant passage of souls to the region of the dead, and a constant return from it to the region of the living. As regards the generality of men, his scheme was wholly inconsistent with a belief in their personal immortality. Yet on conceptions, which were thus imperfect, and which in his different works are not altogether consistent with one another, he has founded the most solemn exhortations to the practice of virtue, with reference to the well-being of the soul, and to the rewards and punishments of a future life.*

Thus, at the conclusion of the argument for the immortality of the soul, which he ascribes to Socrates, as uttered on the day of his death, he represents his master as thus addressing the few friends who were gathered round him in his prison: "But, my friends, it is right to consider this; that, if the soul be immortal, it needs our care not only as regards the present portion of time, which we call life, but as regards the whole of time; and the danger may well appear very great, should we neglect it. If indeed death were a deliverance from all things, it might be a gain for the bad to die, and, with the loss of the soul, to be delivered at the same time from the body and from their wickedness. But now, since it appears that the soul is immortal, there is no other escape from evil, no other safety for it, except in its becoming as good and wise as possible. For the soul will go to Hades, having nothing but its discipline and instruction."

What marvellous words are these to come down to us from pagan antiquity! Be it Socrates or Plato who thus taught, "the counsel which he gave in those days was as if a man had consulted an oracle of God."

* Beside what is contained in the *Phædo*, the most important passages in Plato respecting the immortality of the soul, and the future state of individuals, are, I think, to be found as follows: *Timæus*, pp. 41, 42. p. 90, seqq. *Phædrus*, p. 245, seqq. *Meno*, p. 81, seqq. *De Republicâ*, Lib. x. p. 608, seqq. *Gorgias*, p. 522, seqq. *Apologia*, pp. 40, 41.

There was much connection, as I have said, between the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics and the Platonic philosophy. But those speculations were essentially founded on a doctrine which appears not to have assumed a distinct form in that philosophy till long after the time of Plato, and to have been of Eastern origin. It is the doctrine of the emanation of inferior beings from the Supreme. This doctrine is partially developed by Philo, and from him, perhaps, the Gnostics immediately derived it; as did the catholic Christians, in its application to the production of the Logos. But it is a doctrine which has spread over India; and it was connected by the Gnostics with remarkable conceptions which appear also in the philosophy of the Bramins. Some of them will be adverted to in what follows. They are conceptions, which men placed in very different circumstances do not seem likely to have held in common without some communication with each other. But the channel of communication, between the heretics of the second century, and the philosophers of India, has not been satisfactorily traced.

With these views of the general character of ancient philosophy, and of the influences acting upon the minds of the early Christians, both catholics and heretics, we will proceed to an account of the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics, and particularly of the theory of the Valentinian Ptolemy, in which they appear most fully developed.

CHAPTER VII.

(CONTINUED.)

ON THE PECULIAR SPECULATIONS OF THE THEOSOPHIC
GNOSTICS.

SECTION II.

*On their Speculations concerning the Developement of the Deity,
and the Spiritual World.*

OF the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics, the scheme of the Valentinians as modified by Ptolemy affords the best type or representative. It is particularly explained and dwelt upon by Irenæus. It exhibits the more remarkable features which appear to have been common to their systems. It presents us with the conception of a God far removed from the material universe; and of divine beings, emanant, not created, and, in common with all other spiritual existences, deriving their substance from Him. But its most striking characteristic appears in the representation of those divine beings as hypostatized attributes of God, or hypostatized Ideas of the Divine Mind.*

According to the Ptolemæo-Valentinian system, the First

* The account that follows in this Chapter is derived from the first three chapters of the first book of Irenæus, except where some other authority is referred to. It involves conceptions borrowed from the philosophy of Plato and his followers, which I have elsewhere had occasion to explain. See a "Statement of Reasons for not believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians," pp. 229-288. I refer to this explanation, because the subject is foreign from our present modes of thinking, and may perhaps be better apprehended by being regarded from different points of view; and because in the work mentioned I have given authorities and arguments, which I have not thought it necessary to repeat, for some of the

Cause and First Father of all things dwelt in profound repose for infinite ages in heights invisible and unutterable. He was denominated *the Deep*.^{*} With him was present, as his spouse, *Thought*, who was also called *Favor* and *Silence*. At a certain period the Father determined to put forth from himself the commencement of all things. *Silence* became pregnant through his power, and produced *Intellect*, like and equal to him from whom he was emanant, and alone able to comprehend the greatness of his Father. He was called also *the Only Son*,[†] *the Father*, and *the Beginning*[‡] of all things. With him was likewise produced *Truth*, as his spouse. These four,—four being a mystic number of the highest import with the Pythagoreans,—formed the first Quaternity of *Æons* or *Immortals*, which is the root of all things.

In this account, the three *Æons* or *Immortals* who are introduced together with the Deity, as well as all those *Æons* who will be mentioned hereafter, are to be considered not as allegorical personifications, nor as representing only certain modes in which the undivided Deity may be regarded by man, but as proper persons. The derivative *Æons* are attributes of God hypostatized, permanent manifestations of God in personal forms, powers of God emanant, and acting externally, or archetypal Ideas of the Divine mind endued with life. *Silence*, *Thought* or *Favor*, is to be viewed, at least in consistency with the system, as an attribute of the Deity, residing with him in a personal form. *The Only Son* or *Intellect*, and his spouse, *Truth*, and the other *Æons* hereafter to be mentioned in what follows. I shall hereafter refer to it by the title of "Statement of Reasons."

By *Ideas* in the Platonic philosophy are meant the archetypal forms of all things existing in the *sensible* world, which archetypes or Ideas are supposed to have eternally existed in the *intelligible* world, and to be not only the archetypes but also the formative principles and essences of all things in the sensible world. See before, p. 214. See also Additional Note, E.

* *Βυθός*.

† Or the *Only-begotten*, *Μονογενής*.

‡ Or *Principle*, *Ἀρχή*.

tioned, are only those attributes and Ideas developed, which had before existed, folded up, if one may so speak, in the Divine Mind. Without doubt, unintelligible combinations of thought are presented in this statement; and the theory is not to be comprehended, but can only be pictured before the mind as a fleeting show of changing and inconsistent images. The distinctness of a modern statement does it injustice, by withdrawing it from the doubtful light and mystical obscurity in which it originally appeared. But many theories that have been treated with greater favor and respect are equally exposed to the same disadvantage.

Each male Æon hereafter mentioned is, I believe, further to be considered as a developement of some particular property of his immediate progenitor, the Æon from whom he emanates; and each female Æon is an hypostatized Idea of somewhat intimately connected with, or immediately resulting from, her consort.* In this last conception we perceive one of those remarkable coincidences which present themselves, between the theology of India and that of the Gnostics. "The Hindu goddesses," says Sir William Jones, "are uniformly represented as the subordinate *powers* of their respective Lords."†

* "Feminam enim Æonem pariter esse oportet cum masculo, secundum eos, quum sit velut affectio ejus. Et hæc quum ita se habeant, et quum hæc dicantur ab ipsis," &c. Irenæus, Lib. ii. c. 12. §§ 2, 3. p. 128. That this fact is only mentioned incidentally by Irenæus shows how imperfect is our information respecting the theories of the Gnostics in regard to all but their fundamental doctrines. Some further intimations of it are collected by Massuet in his first Dissertation on Irenæus. Irenæi Opp. P. ii. pp. 16, 22. "Nothing," he says, (p. 16,) "is of more frequent occurrence in Proclus and others [of the Platonists], than gods, some male, some female, and some both male and female, where by the female are meant nothing but the powers and faculties of the gods, intimately adhering to them, through which they operate, and produce their proper effects."

† Argument of Hymn to Sereswaty.—"Although," says Professor Wilson, "the general worship of the female personifications of the Hindu deities forms a class by itself, yet when individualized as the associates of the divinities, whose energies they are, their adoration becomes so linked with that of the male power, that it is not easy even to their votaries to draw a precise line of distinction be-

In the Hindu theology we find likewise the strange conception, which appears in the scheme of the Gnostics, of assigning a spouse to the Supreme Being. "The worship of the female principle," says Professor Wilson, "as distinct from the divinity, appears to have originated in the literal interpretation of the metaphorical language of the *Vedas*, in which the *will or purpose to create* the universe is represented as originating from the creator, and co-existent with him as his bride, and part of himself." He adds, that in the Sankhya system of philosophy, "Nature, *Prakriti*, or *Múla Prakriti*, is defined to be of eternal existence and independent origin, distinct from the Supreme Spirit, productive though no production, and the plastic origin of all things, including even the gods. Hence *Prakriti* has come to be regarded as the mother of gods and men, whilst as one with matter, the source of error, it is again identified with *Máyá*, or delusion, and as co-existent with the Supreme as his *Sákti*, his personified energy, or his bride. These mythological fancies have been principally disseminated by the *Puránas*, in all which *Prakriti* or *Máyá* bears a prominent part."* We shall have occasion again to advert to the subject.

But it should be observed, that Irenæus incidentally mentions, that the Valentinians "sometimes represented the Father as united with *Silence*, and sometimes as raised above both the male and female nature."† Mysticism admits,

tween them." "Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus." Asiatic Researches, Vol. xvi. p. 125. See also, to the same effect, Colonel Vans Kennedy's "Ancient and Hindu Mythology," pp. 189, 283, 317, seqq.

* Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus. Asiatic Researches, Vol. xvii. p. 211-213.

† Lib. i. c. 2. § 4. p. 10.—In systems, like that of the Valentinians, which are formed out of allegories and metaphors petrified into doctrines, it is often difficult to determine how far the process has gone on. We cannot always readily distinguish in their language between what remains of a figurative character, and what has hardened into an article of belief. But there seems no good reason to question that the Valentinians ascribed a proper personal existence to the spouse of God, as well as to their other Æons. On the contrary, when Philo, like

or rather delights in, contradictions ; and it may appear useless to attempt to account for language which Irenæus has left unexplained. But it seems probable, that the Valentinians ascribed a commencement to the personal existence of *Silence*, as well as to that of the other Æons ; and it is also to be kept in mind, that their whole system of Æons is an account of the developement of the Divine Nature, which, according to the notions of the Valentinians, might be viewed either in its essential unity, or as resolved into these different hypostases.

From these explanations and remarks we return to the detail of Ptolemy's account of the Pleroma. The first Quaternity of Æons having been formed, the process of emanation went on. The Æons continued to be emitted in pairs, one of each pair being male, and the other female. *The Only Son* (likewise called, it is to be recollected, *Intellect* and *the Beginning*), understanding the end of his production, which was to be the fountain of being, emitted the *Logos* (or *Reason*) and *Life*, the *Logos* being the Father of all who were to succeed him. This derivation of the *Logos* and *Life*, the Valentinians maintained to be taught in the first verses of St. John's Gospel, pointing and rendering one passage differently from what we do. "In *the Beginning*," that is, said they, in *the Only Son*, one of whose names is *the Beginning*, "was the *Logos*, and what was formed in him was *Life*:" that is, *Life*, his Spouse.* Perhaps, in the ostentation of superior acuteness, the Valentinians had refined upon the common doctrine, the doctrine of Philo, who derived the *Logos* immediately from God, and had thus interposed a new being between the *Logos* and God. But in these conceptions there was a remarkable coincidence between them and Origen.

Ptolemy, assigned a spouse to God, Wisdom, (see "Statement of Reasons," pp. 255, 256,) it cannot be doubted that his language is metaphorical, though he hypostatized the *Logos* and other Powers of God.

* Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 8. § 5. p. 41. Doctrina Orientalis, § 6. p. 968.

He explains the first verse of John in a similar manner. Following the Septuagint translation of the twenty-second verse of the eighth chapter of Proverbs, which is to this effect ;— “The Lord formed me [Wisdom] *the beginning* of his ways to his works ;” * and, hypostatizing the wisdom of God, † he contends that the Logos was in *the Beginning*, because the Logos always existed in *Wisdom* ; and that he was not simply with God, but was so as being in *Wisdom*. On this doctrine he insists repeatedly in his Commentary on John. ‡ It may be remarked that a similar conception is found in Tertullian. The prophets and Apostles teach, he says, “that Wisdom was first formed [by God] *the beginning of his ways to his works* ; and that the Logos (*Sermo*) was then put forth, by whom all things were made.” §

To go on with the system of Ptolemy ; from the *Logos* (or *Reason*) and *Life* proceeded another pair of Æons, *Man* and *the Church*. Here again, perhaps, appears an over-subtilty in separating what had been before united. For, according to Philo, the Logos was the archetypal Idea of man, “the Man of God ;” || and a similar conception is found in Clement of Alexandria. ¶

The eight Æons who have been mentioned, namely, God, under the name of *the Deep*, and *Thought*, *Intellect* and *Truth*, the *Logos* and *Life*, *Man* and *the Church*, formed the primitive Ogdoad, ** which, according to Irenæus, was, in common with the first Quaternity of Æons, denominated “the root and support of all things.” The Valentinians gave to it also the four names of the four male Æons ; intending, as I conceive, thus

* Κύριος ἐκτίσέ με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ. In this passage, which Origen often quotes in his Commentary on John, he several times (according to his present text) gives the reading ὁδόν instead of ὁδῶν.

† Comment. in Joannem. Opp. iv. 39, 40.

‡ Ibid. pp. 20-22, 47, et alibi.

§ Advers. Hermogenem, c. 45. p. 249.

|| De Confusione Linguarum. Opp. i. 411, 413.

¶ Stromat. v. § 14. p. 703.

** “Ogdoad,” from the Greek ὀγδοάς, here meaning *the Eight*.

to signify, that these are only different names of the same Being, as viewed with reference to his essential nature, or to his different hypostatized attributes. Thus Theodoret says, that "they affirmed the Ogdoad to be the First Æon," that is, God.*

But the production of the Æons did not stop here. Ten others besides *Man* and *the Church* emanated from the *Logos* and *Life*; and twelve from *Man* and *the Church*. This new generation of Æons appears to be another process of decomposition, in which the attributes of the *Logos*, the common progenitor of them all, are separated into distinct persons, the male Æons; while the female are hypostatized Ideas of something intimately connected with those attributes. All these Æons have significant names, which confirm, I think, the suggestion just made, but of which it is not worth while to give a translation. None of them reappears individually in the system, except the last female Æon proceeding from *Man* and *the Church*, who was named *Wisdom*; being, as I conceive, the hypostatized Idea of human wisdom. This Æon does, as will appear, play a conspicuous part in it.

Thirty Æons have been mentioned; and these thirty Æons formed, according to Irenæus, the Pleroma of the Valentinians, that is to say, the Full Developement of the Divine Nature. Four other Æons belong, as we shall see, to the system of Ptolemy; but these four Irenæus says were not considered as belonging to the Pleroma.† He argues against the inconsistency of their being excluded from it; nor does any reason appear why they were so. It is to be observed, that they could have been separated from the Pleroma only when that was conceived of as the Developement of the Deity. In the Pleroma considered as the Spiritual Realm of God, they were undoubtedly included. But I strongly suspect, that the statement of Irenæus is a misapprehension, founded perhaps on the fact that the Valentinians originally acknow-

* Hæret. Fab. Lib. i. n. 7. Opp. iv. 198. The passage which I quote is obviously wrongly pointed and translated in Sirmond's edition.

† Irenæus, Lib. ii. c. 12. § 7. p. 129.

ledged the existence only of the thirty Æons who have been mentioned.* It is not probable, that those who adopted the system of Ptolemy excluded the other four from the Pleroma in either sense of that word. We shall hereafter see particular reasons to believe that they did not. But it is to be observed, that the Valentinian Æons are commonly spoken of as being thirty in number. After enumerating the Æons who have been mentioned, Tertullian says; "This is that mystical Pleroma, the plenitude of the thirty-fold Divinity." †

The mystery of the thirty Æons, the Valentinians believed to be shadowed forth by the thirty years, which our Saviour spent in private before commencing his ministry; and by the parable of the laborers, who were sent into the vineyard at the first, third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours, these numbers taken together amounting to thirty; and, according to Irenæus, they made similar use of all those passages in Scripture in which numbers are mentioned, so far as they could accommodate them to their system. Of their Æons, generally, they found abundant notices in the New Testament, where a modern reader, unacquainted with the original, would not suspect their existence; that is to say, in expressions where the Greek word αἰών, ‡ æon, occurs. Thus they maintained, that the Æons were often mentioned by St. Paul in the plainest manner, as, for instance, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, § where the words are rendered in the common Version; "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end;" which words they understood as meaning, "To Him be glory—throughout all the generations of the Æon of the Æons," || that is, throughout all the generations of the first Æon, God.

* The Author of the Addition to Tertullian (c. 49) says, that "Valentinus fixed the number of Æons at thirty;" but that Ptolemy added others.

† "Hoc erit Pleroma illud arcanum, Divinitatis tricenariæ plenitudo." *Adver. Valentinianos*, c. 8. p. 253.

‡ "Age," often rendered in the Common Version "World." § Ch. iii. 21.

|| Εἰς πᾶσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων. Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 3. § L. p. 14; where see Massuet's note.

It is necessary to keep in mind, especially as we proceed, that we are treating of imaginations with which reason has nothing to do, and which cannot be brought into any coherence with one another. The derivative Æons are to be regarded not merely as attributes of God, or as Ideas of the Divine Mind, but as distinct persons capable of individual acts; and as being, with the exception of *the Only Son*, not only imperfect, but fallible.

Thus, according to Ptolemy, in the developement of beings from the Divine Substance, inferior to the Supreme, there was a commencement of imperfection, and consequent disorder, which finally led to the production of the material world. Of the immediate origin of this disorder the following account is given. The First Father, God, was comprehended by his first emanation, *the Only Son*, or *Intellect*, and by him alone. He alone enjoyed the beatific vision of God. But all the other Æons felt the desire of obtaining the same knowledge; especially *Wisdom*, the last and youngest of the twelve proceeding from *Man* and *the Church*. In her the passion became inordinate. She strove earnestly to comprehend the greatness of the Father, but it was impossible. The depths of his nature are unsearchable; and she, urged on by strong love, would at last have been swallowed up in them, and lost, had she not been restrained and held back by an Æon not before mentioned, the Æon *Horos* or *the Boundary*. Being controlled by him, she returned to herself, gave up her purpose, and was restored to her place in the Pleroma.

The Æon just mentioned, *Horos* or *the Boundary*, was an emanation from the Father, through *the Only Son*. He was without a consort. His offices were to give stability to beings, and to separate them from each other as by a rampart. In reference to his different employments many different names were given him, and among others, that of Σταυρός (*Stauros*), not in the sense of "cross," but in that of "rampart." Having, however, given him this name, the Valentinians had no difficulty in finding passages of the New Testament in

which he was referred to, passages in which the word *σταυρός*, "cross," occurs. Several examples of such application are given by Irenæus. The Gnostics were able the more readily to find proofs and mystical intimations of their doctrines in the New Testament from the number of names which they gave to the same Æon, and from assigning (as we shall see hereafter) the same name to different Æons.

Wisdom was restored to her place; but the agony of her passion had given birth to a shapeless female abortion, which was cast out of the Pleroma, and whose future fortunes we shall hereafter have occasion to follow. Then, in order to give stability to the Pleroma, and to prevent other Æons from suffering as *Wisdom* had done, *the Only Son*, under the direction of the Father, emitted a new pair, *Christ* and *the Holy Spirit*. The office of *Christ* was to give them such knowledge concerning their own nature, the Father, and *the Only Son*, as they were capable of receiving. All being placed on an equality, *the Holy Spirit* taught them thanksgiving, and gave them true peace. Thus all corresponding to each other in form and mind, each male Æon became an *Intellect*, a *Logos*, a *Man*, and a *Christ*; and each female, in like manner, a *Truth*, a *Life*, a *Church*, and a *Holy Spirit*.* "Ovid might have destroyed his *Metamorphoses*," says Tertullian, "if he had been acquainted with this greater metamorphosis."† In this account of the amalgamation, as it were, of the Æons, the conception, I suppose, discovers itself, that, notwithstanding their personal division, they are, under one aspect, included

* Hence it appears that *Christ* and *the Holy Spirit*, two of the four additional Æons of Ptolemy, belonged to the Pleroma considered as the Developement of God. Nor is it probable, considering the mode of his derivation, that *Horos* was excluded from it; nor that the Æon *Jesus* (to be immediately mentioned above), "the star of the Pleroma," did not belong to the Pleroma in the highest sense of that word. It follows, that there can be little doubt of the incorrectness of the assertion of Irenæus before mentioned (pp. 243, 244). I remark this principally as affording one among the constantly recurring proofs of the inaccuracy, imperfection and inconsistency of the accounts of the Gnostics transmitted to us by the fathers.

† Advers. Valentinianos, c. 12. p. 255.

in the unity of the Father, as being his hypostatized attributes and Ideas; and that the Æons, though distinct persons, constituted but one Divine Being. This, considering all that precedes, it may be said, is an incredible imputation of absurdity on the Valentinians. Perhaps not. As we may talk of one infinite as being less than another, so we may talk of one doctrine, though utterly absurd, as being less absurd than another; and thus we may say, that the doctrine of the Valentinians is less absurd than Pantheism, a theory which has found favor in modern times. By "Pantheism" I certainly do not mean the doctrine that God is in all things, with which of late some have attempted to confound it; but, using the word in its proper sense, I mean the doctrine that all things constitute the one God.

In return for the new blessing which they had received, the Æons, full of joy, agreed together, each to contribute what was most excellent in himself, and, uniting all their gifts, to put forth in common a new Æon in honor of the Father. This being, who was the perfection, the star of the Pleroma, was denominated *Jesus* or *the Saviour*. He bore also the patronymic names of *Christ* and the *Logos*, and, with reference to the mode of his production, was likewise called *All* or *All things*. With him emanated angels of a like nature, as attendants.

Of the sufferings of *Wisdom*, the last of the twelve Æons proceeding from *Man* and *the Church*, the Valentinians found a symbol in the apostacy of Judas, the twelfth of the Apostles, and in the suffering of Christ in the twelfth month (as they believed) of his ministry. The Æon *Wisdom* was typified also by the woman, who, having had an issue of blood for twelve years, was cured by touching the fringe of the Saviour's garment, as *Wisdom* was restored upon touching the borders of the first Quaternity. To the Æon *Jesus*, one of whose names was *All things*, they applied various passages of Scripture, specified by Irenæus, in which *all things* are mentioned. And thus, says Irenæus, they pervert to their purpose pas-

sages from the Gospels and Epistles, endeavouring to misinterpret them into proofs of their doctrine; and not only so, but with much subtilty and cunning they make the same use of the Law and the Prophets, in which many things, being said allegorically, are capable on account of the ambiguity of their meaning of being diversely applied. The expositions of the Valentinians illustrate in some degree the intellectual character of their age; but I have adduced them particularly for the purpose of showing what constant use they made of the Scriptures and especially of the Gospels.

Such, according to Ptolemy, was the commencement and derivation of existences inferior to the Supreme. It would be idle to attempt to settle all the questions that his scheme suggests, many of which, probably, he had not answered in his own mind, nor even proposed to himself. But there are several considerations that may serve to throw some light upon it.

In the first place, then, the *Æons* were formed of the substance of the Deity, as is implied in their being hypostatized attributes or Ideas of the Divine Mind. The conception of proper spiritual existence was not familiar to the minds of the ancient philosophers, and had as yet, it is probable, been attained only by the smaller portion of the early Christians. As we have seen, Ptolemy himself taught that the "substance of the underived Father was pure and uniform light;" * and this imagination appears to have been common.† It facilitated the conception of the formation of other beings out of his substance. Before the introduction of Christianity, as has been already implied,‡ the doctrine of proper creation, or of causing that to be, the material of which did not previously exist, was unknown to the ancient philosophers. Matter, consequently, was regarded as uncreated and eternal. Those

* See before, p. 204.

† See Additional Note, E.

‡ See before, p. 197.

who were not, as the Epicureans, simple materialists, but believed, with Plato, in mind as a coëternal principle, contented only, that the forms and modifications of matter were given to it by a superior power or powers. Primitive matter furnished the substance of all things sensible. But in following out the same principle, the substance of spiritual beings came to be considered as the Infinite Spirit. The doctrine that the human intellect is a portion, or efflux, or emanation of the Divinity, has been very extensively held. The Stoics regarded it as a particle of that ethereal fire which was, in their view, the animating principle of all things, the universal Soul, God. Philo says that every human mind is allied to the Divine Logos (Intellect), being an impress or particle or ray of that blessed nature.* “The soul,” he teaches, “proceeded from the Father and Ruler of All; for what he breathed into man was the divine spirit, sent here to dwell as in a foreign land.”† How else, he asks, can we account for the wonderful powers of the human mind, “if it be not an *indivisible* portion‡ of the Divine and Blessed Soul; for the Divine Nature is not divided and separated, but is only extended.”§ The author of the Clementine Homilies says, that “the soul, proceeding from God, is of the same substance with him;” || that is, *consubstantial* with him, according to the technical language of theology. Justin Martyr says, “We are allied to God, for the soul is divine and immortal, and a portion of the Ruling Mind which sees God;”¶ that is, of the Logos. Some of the fathers who followed Justin adopted a similar doctrine, though it was earnestly opposed by Clement of Alexandria** and others. I mention these

* De Mundi Opificio. Opp. i. 35. The word “particle” does not express the force of the original term ἀπόσπασμα. See also Legis Allegoriæ, Lib. iii. Opp. i. 119.

† De Mundi Opificio. p. 32.

‡ “Portion” Ἀπόσπασμα.

§ Quod Deterius Potiori insidiari soleat. Opp. i. 208, 209.

|| Homilia xvi. § 16.

¶ Dial. cum Tryph. p. 145.

** Stromat. ii. § 16. pp. 467, 468. Stromat. v. § 13. p. 699.

facts to show, that there was nothing foreign from the philosophy of the times in the supposition of the Gnostics, that beings of a higher order than man were formed from the substance of God. It may be added, that the philosophy of the Bramins teaches, that all finite minds are but portions of the Divine. Thus it is said in one of the Upanishads ; “ As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks of the same nature proceed, so from the Eternal Supreme Being various souls come forth, and again they return into him.” * The Gnostic Pleroma, with its Æons derived from the substance of God, is likewise coincident with the *World of Emanations* of the Jewish Cabbalists, in which ten *Sephiroths* or *Splendors*, hypostatized powers of God, were conceived of by them, as emanating, like the Gnostic Æons, from that eternal light, which they, like Ptolemy, regarded as constituting the substance of God.

The derivative Æons were attributes and Ideas hypostatized ; how then are we to regard them in their new character as persons ? Concerning the manner of their production, and the mode of their existence, the Gnostics, according to Irenæus, did not explain themselves clearly, a fact which may be readily believed. He, therefore, undertakes to show that their doctrine must be false, whatever notions they might entertain on those subjects.† He supposes, that the derivative Æons may be compared to rays emitted from the sun, or to branches shooting from a tree, or to torches lighted from one already burning. These are all illustrations which were used by some of the orthodox fathers to explain the emanation, or, as they called it, the generation, of the Logos from God ;—though their application to this purpose is virtually rejected by Irenæus.‡ It appears also, that the Gnostics compared their Æon *Logos*, proceeding from the Æon *Intellect*, to Logos, that is, *discourse* (according to one sense of

* Rammohun Roy's Translation of the Moonduk-Opunishud.

† Lib. ii. c. 12. et c. 17.

‡ Ubi supra, et c. 13.

the term "Logos"), proceeding from the human intellect;* which was another favorite figure of the fathers to represent the generation of the orthodox Logos. The further question is raised by Irenæus, whether the Æons were to be considered as united with God after their emanation, or whether this was effectual and complete, so as to separate them from him, as the offspring of a man is separated from its parent.† The epithet translated "effectual and complete," the himself, though inconsistently with other passages in his writings, applies to the generation of the Logos.‡ The question last mentioned he leaves us to suppose was, like most of the others he suggests, unanswered by the Valentinians. He proposes still another, whether the Æons were of the substance of the Divinity, or of a different substance. But this is evidently introduced rather for the sake of exhausting, by way of argument, all possible suppositions relating to the subject, than because any real doubt existed, that the Gnostics believed them to be of the divine substance.

But, after all his discussion of the subject, sufficient reasons exist for believing that there were some imaginations of the Gnostics respecting the production of their derivative Æons, which Irenæus has not brought distinctly into view. There is no connection between our idea of emanation, or the flowing forth of one body from another, as a ray from the sun, and that of the ordinary production of animals. But, incongruous as these ideas are, the Valentinians, it appears, confused them together. This may be inferred from their introduction of female Æons; from their supposition that *Wisdom*, the last of the Æons, brought forth an abortive offspring without union with her spouse;§ and especially from their account of the production of the first derivative

* Lib. ii. c. 13. § 8. p. 131. See "Statement of Reasons," p. 283, seqq.

† "An [emissi] *efficabiliter* et partiliter." "Sed si quidem *efficabiliter* unusquisque illorum emissus est secundum hominum similitudinem," &c. Lib. ii. c. 17. §§ 2, 3. p. 138.

‡ He calls it *efficabilis generatio*. Lib. iii. c. 11. § 8. p. 190.

§ "Sine alterius complexu." Irenæus, Lib. ii. c. 12. § 4. p. 128.

male *Æon, the Only Son*.^{*} But there is other abundant evidence of the fact. Origen, in speaking of the orthodox doctrine, says that "the Father did not *emit* the Son, as some think." The term used by him is that which the Gnostics applied to the production of their *Æons*. "For," continues Origen, "if the Son were an emission of the Father, and the Father generated him from himself, as animals produce their offspring, it would follow that both the emitter and the emitted must be corporeal."[†] The doctrine of the *generation* of the *Æons* is presented, as I have before remarked, in a very gross form by a writer whom Epiphanius calls a Valentinian; and Clement of Alexandria, in exculpating the Valentinians of his time from impurity, does so on the ground that they supposed only a spiritual intercourse between the *Æons*.[‡] Respecting the manner of their production, the Gnostics, probably, as others in like cases have done, used language in the hope that it contained some meaning, without having themselves any definite imagination of what that meaning might be. To the association of female *Æons* with male in the work of emanation, we find an analogy in the religion of the Bramins, of which it is said to be a fundamental principle, "that an invisible and immaterial being cannot manifest himself or exert his power except under a corporeal form, and that the energies of the male must remain inoperative until rendered active by a union with the passive qualities of the female. Hence, on willing creation, the Supreme Being necessarily, in order to effect that object, first gave existence to a male and female, who are known under the names of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, and which alone are considered to be the original agents in the formation of this universe." It is added, that these are "corporeal manifesta-

* See before, p. 238.

† 'Τιού γίνεται Πατήρ οὐ προβαλὼν αὐτὸν ὡς οἴονται τινες· εἰ γὰρ προβολή ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Πατρὸς, καὶ γεννᾷ μὲν ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ὅποια τὰ τῶν ζώων γεννήματα, ἀνάγκη σῶμα εἶναι τὸν προβάλλοντα καὶ τὸν προβεβλημένον. De Principiis, Lib. iv. § 28. Opp. i. 190.

‡ Πνευματικὰς ἐτίθεντο κοινωνίας.—See before, pp. 55, 56.

tions of his essence;" and "that all males, whether gods or men, are considered to be merely forms of *Purusha*, and all females, forms of *Prakriti*."* In different words, these are the hypostatized Platonic Ideas or generic forms, the one of all that is male, the other of all that is female.

Irenæus objects to the Gnostic theories, that they were founded on conceptions concerning the human mind transferred to the Deity. The Valentinians, as he tells us, had formed notions of the properties, conditions, and acts of the mind of man, and, in their ignorance of God, ascribed them to the Father of All; making Thought to proceed from the Deity, Intellect from Thought, and Reason (the Logos) from Intellect. He argues against this decomposition of the Deity, and the supposed emission of those attributes as hypostases, in a manner which bore equally against the orthodox doctrine of the Logos as it existed in the second and third centuries. God, he insists, is altogether simple and uncompounded, wholly intellect, wholly reason [Logos], wholly light. But to suppose Intellect to have been emitted from him, so as to have a distinct existence, is to suppose God a compound being. Whence and where, he asks, was Intellect emitted? What space was there exterior to the Intellect of God into which it could be sent forth?† I thus quote his reasoning, in an abridged form, in order further to illustrate the speculations of the Gnostics, and, through those, the style of speculation which existed in and after the time of the Gnostics.

Tertullian, in a passage formerly quoted, says that "Ptolemy numbered the Æons in classes, and gave them distinct names; assigning to them the character of personal existences, but external to the Deity, while Valentinus had included those existences in the totality of the Divinity as feelings, affections, and emotions."‡ It has been supposed that Ter-

* Kennedy's Ancient and Hindu Mythology, pp. 283, 284. See before, p. 240.

† Lib. ii. c. 13. Conf. c. 14. § 8.

‡ See before, p. 54, note.

tullian, in these words, meant to assert that Valentinus did not hypostatize the Æons. But, if so, he would apparently contradict himself in two other passages ;* and his account would be irreconcilable with that of Irenæus,† with whom he elsewhere accords in his report of the Valentinian doctrines, and whom he evidently appears to have taken for a guide on the subject. It may be, therefore, that Tertullian here ascribes to Valentinus an opinion mentioned by Irenæus (hypothetically, as one that might be entertained by the Gnostics), according to which the Æons were not properly emitted, but remained within the Father, as circles one within another, all surrounded by him.‡ But, whatever were the meaning of Tertullian in regard to Valentinus, there is no doubt, that the theosophic Gnostics, generally, regarded their Æons as hypostases. In another place Tertullian describes them as Platonic Ideas,§ a representation altogether consistent with the fact just stated. Philo, in like manner, gives the name of Ideas to the hypostatized powers of God, considering them as the formative principles of all things. ||

The conception of hypostatized attributes and Ideas of the Divine Mind is one which has most extensively prevailed. Turning from the Gnostics, we perceive it in the speculations of the catholic Christians concerning the Logos and the Holy Spirit ; in those of Philo concerning the Powers of God ; in the Sephiroths of the Jewish Cabbala ; and in the philosophy of the later Platonists. We discern it in the ancient Persian

* *Advers. Praxeam*, c. 8. p. 504. *Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 5.* pp. 367, 368. In these passages Tertullian represents Valentinus as attributing a proper personal existence to the Æons. Thus, in the first passage referred to, he says ; "Valentinus probolas suas discernit et separat ab auctore." But he may, according to a use of language not uncommon in the fathers, have intended to denote the sect of the Valentinians by the name of Valentinus, and thus have ascribed to him individually opinions held only by his followers.

† Irenæus, *Lib. i. c. 11.* p. 52, seqq.

‡ *Lib. ii. c. 13. §§ 6, 7.* p. 131.

§ *De Animâ*, c. 18. pp. 276, 277.

|| See "Statement of Reasons," p. 262, seqq.

theology ; and it is displayed with the broadest extravagance in the religion of the Hindus. The coincidences between the speculations of the Hindus and of the theosophic Gnostics are very remarkable. Some of them have been merely touched upon. In the "Institutes of Menu," in the first chapter, the doctrine of emanation is unfolded into a scheme, which bears a striking resemblance to that of the Valentinians in its general character and in some of its details. In that work, which, though much less ancient, perhaps, than even some European scholars have supposed, has yet certainly for many centuries been regarded as of divine authority by the Hindu sages, the system presented is, to say the least, as remarkable as that of Ptolemy, for the extravagance of its imaginations, for the absence of any foundation in what is known or knowable, and for a series of conceptions, from which it could not be inferred, that reason is a faculty of the human mind.

In the systems founded on the doctrine of emanation, incongruous as they are throughout, there is nothing more extraordinary than the personal characters sometimes ascribed to the hypostatized attributes and Ideas of the Deity. They are not only represented as beings far inferior to God, a notion in which, however incomprehensible, the imagination may acquiesce, and by which the feelings are not shocked ; but they are sometimes represented as ignorant, fallible beings, capable of suffering. Such they appear in the system of Ptolemy, particularly in the case of *Wisdom*, the last of the female Æons. In the popular religion of the Hindus the extravagance becomes outrageous ; for the most abominable fables are related even concerning the three immediate manifestations of the Supreme Being, Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu. As regards the aberrations and sufferings ascribed to *Wisdom* in the Valentinian scheme, we may in some degree reconcile our imagination to them, if we conceive of this Æon, as we probably should, not certainly as the proper

Wisdom of God hypostatized, but as the hypostatized Idea of human wisdom.

In this notion, that a being who is an hypostatized attribute or Idea of the Divine Mind may be capable of suffering, there was a strange coincidence,—a coincidence where we might least have expected it,—between the opinions of the Valentinians and those of some of the more eminent early fathers. These fathers believed that the Logos, that is, the hypostatized Reason, or Wisdom, of God, was the proper sufferer in the sufferings of Christ.* The fact becomes the more remarkable, when we find that the theosophic Gnostics, though they agreed with the fathers referred to in the general principle, that an hypostatized being belonging to the Divine Nature might suffer, started wide asunder from them in this application of it, and maintained that the Divine Being or Æon, who was united with the man Jesus, did not suffer with him, but left him and returned to the Pleroma before the crucifixion. The Marcionites regarded the apparent body of Christ as a mere phantom incapable of suffering. In opposition to these doctrines of the Gnostics, those fathers insisted that the Logos himself truly suffered in the body in which he was incarnate. The doctrine was not at once universally assented to. Clement of Alexandria vacillates concerning it; and Origen did not adopt it. But, losing all sense and vitality, and growing into a shape still more monstrous, it finally prevailed; and its ghastly spectre still haunts the Christian world. The doctrine in its latest form, if we may give the name of *doctrine* to words utterly without meaning, is, that God himself suffered.

In order to apprehend, as far as possible, the fancies of the Valentinians, it may be observed, that their scheme of the Pleroma is a sort of allegory, blended with certain philosophical speculations of their age, and transformed into a system of opinions. A great part of it consists of figures of

* See "Statement of Reasons," Section v. p. 62, seqq.

speech arrested and fixed as proper conceptions. That God, before the existence of other beings, dwelt alone with Thought, or Benevolence, or Silence ; that, in the production of those beings, his Mind (*Noûς*, Intellect) was first put forth and manifested externally ; that Truth is an eternal attribute of the operations of the Divine Mind ; that the Power by which all things are formed and disposed, *Logos*, or Reason, or the Disposing Power, proceeds from, or is a manifestation of, the same Mind of God, and that this Power is the source of Life to all beings produced by it, are propositions sufficiently intelligible, though presenting an artificial and strange arrangement of conceptions. These propositions appear to form the ground-work of the theory of the Valentinians. We next find them regarding the *Logos* or Reason of God as the archetype of Man, Man being formed in the image of God as regards his reason alone. Under this aspect, the *Logos* becomes, as he is represented by Philo, the generic Idea of Man ; and the great end of Man's being is to be united with the true worshippers of God, or the Church. We have here the first eight *Æons*, the primitive *Ogdoad*, of the Valentinians. Then follow the two series of ten and twelve *Æons*, in which, as we may conjecture, are respectively represented the attributes belonging to, and the effects produced by, the *Logos*, viewed first in relation to the universe, and afterwards in relation to the Church.

The Valentinians, however, would probably have been little satisfied with an explanation of their theory, which, throwing a part of it into the shade, and restoring, as far as possible, a figurative character to their language, should have converted it into nothing more than an obscure expression of common thoughts, unnaturally adjusted together. They professed, according to Irenæus, to teach "wonderful and unspeakable and deep mysteries, known only to themselves." * There is no doubt that they spoke of their doctrines in terms which might have given sufficient warning, the subject was not one

* Lib. i. c. 1. § 3. p. 7 ; c. 4. § 3. p. 20.

for the understanding to intrude upon ; and that their mysteries were to be discerned only by the internal power of vision, which belonged exclusively to themselves as the spiritual.

Such was the system of the Ptolemæo-Valentinians respecting the Pleroma, or, in other words, respecting the Deity and his emanations. Systems very similar to it appear to have been held by most of the theosophic Gnostics. To enter into a detailed examination of their varieties, founded on the imperfect, questionable, confused, and contradictory information that remains to us, would be wholly foreign from our present purpose ; and, were it not so, would be, for the most part, a useless and unsatisfactory discussion, repaying in no degree the toil of the inquiry. These visionary and baseless speculations were, from their nature, unfixed and changing. The system of emanations was continually receiving new modifications from the different individuals by whom it was adopted. "Many, nay, all of them," says Irenæus, "separate from the heresy in which they were, through a desire of being teachers, and proceed to advance something new."* But generally, the fundamental principles of the theosophic Gnostics, and their modes of philosophizing, were the same, and their variations from each other rarely appear to have been such as to make them an object of any interest or curiosity. According to an ancient proverb, quoted by Irenæus,* "It is not necessary to drain the ocean, to learn that its waters are salt." The proverb is applicable to many other speculations beside those of the Gnostics, and to many volumes that might otherwise present themselves before us in formidable array.

I have, however, in the preceding part of this work, had occasion several times to mention the Basilidians ; and though

* Lib. i. c. 28. § 1. p. 106.—See Vol. ii. p. 30.

† Lib. ii. c. 19. § 8. p. 144.

their peculiar opinions, so far as they may be learned or conjectured from such information as remains to us, throw but little additional light on the general character of the theosophic Gnostics, yet there are one or two questions concerning them of some interest. I shall, therefore, speak of them in a Note at the end of this volume.*

But there is one other sect that may here deserve a brief notice. It is that of the Marcosians, of whose system Irenæus gives as full an account as of that of the Ptolemæo-Valentinians;† probably because, as he mentions, they prevailed particularly in his neighbourhood, on the Rhone.‡ Epiphanius has transcribed his account, but neither he, nor any other writer, affords any additional knowledge concerning them. They were a branch of the great body of the Valentinians. The general outline of their system of emanations was similar to that of Ptolemy. What was most peculiar to them was their connecting it with speculations, utterly unintelligible, concerning the mysterious powers and relations of words and letters. To these speculations an analogy, which we shall hereafter notice, may be found in the Jewish Cabala. They were allied also to the catholic doctrine concerning the Logos;§ according to which the Logos, existing in God as his internal Reason or *Discourse* (conformably to a now obsolete signification of the word *Discourse*, in which it was synonymous with *Reason*), was generated by him as a person, and became his uttered Discourse or Word.||

The system of the Marcosians is an object of some curiosity, as affording one of the most remarkable among ancient examples of the depths of mysticism (a term that, in philosophical language, is the euphemism for nonsense), into which the mind may sink, and there revel. As their speculations, which fill page after page in Irenæus, relate to Greek words

* See Additional Note, F.

† Lib. i. capp. 13-21. pp. 59-98.

‡ Ibid. c. 13. § 7. p. 65.

§ Ibid. c. 14. § 1. p. 66.

|| See "Statement of Reasons," p. 283, seqq.

and letters, it is difficult to detach a portion of them which may be clothed throughout in an English dress. But the following passage may suffice. Irenæus had before him some work or works, apparently of Marcus, the founder of the sect, from which he copied or abstracted his account; and he has given the words of his original.

“ Know that your twenty-four letters are effluences, which present images of the three Powers that include the whole number of the elements above. Understand that the nine mutes are of the Father and *Truth*, because they are without sound; that is, unspeakable and inexpressible. But the eight semi-vowels are of the *Logos* and *Life*; because they are, as it were, intermediate between the mutes and the vocals (the vowels), and as they are effluent from those above them, so those below them bear a like relation to them. The vocals (vowels), being seven, are of *Man* and *the Church*. For a voice proceeding from the *Man* gave form to all things; for the sound of the voice clothed them with form.”*

In like manner with the Marcosians, and in the same spirit, the Jewish Cabbalists, according to Basnage, discoursed of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. “ Every letter,” they said, “ has some relation to the Sephiroths or Splendors [the first emanations from the Divinity], or to the works of God.” Thus, for example, the first letter of the Alphabet “ indicates the inaccessible light of the Divinity. It is related to the first of the Sephiroths.” “ It infolds likewise other great mysteries,” which it is unnecessary to detail. “ The first ten letters answer to the ten Sephiroths, and the other letters have other uses.” “ The world was created with reference to the Hebrew Alphabet, and the harmony of the creatures is like that of the letters which God employed in composing the Book of Life. A certain assemblage of letters causes the beauty and excellence of the universe; and, since the world was made with reference to the Alphabet, certain things must necessarily be attached to every letter, and of these things

* Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 14. § 5. p. 70.

it is the symbol and emblem.”* Perhaps the mysticism of the Cabbalists would be better brought out by saying, that in these things the letter exerts its power.

Beside the mysterious powers and relations of letters, Marcus likewise introduced those of numbers into his system. But speculations on the respective powers of different numbers were a common extravagance among the ancient philosophers from a very early period;—we might say from the time of Pythagoras, if the accounts of his life and doctrines were not, for the greater part, fabulous, so that little can be affirmed with confidence concerning him. Such speculations were fundamental in the philosophy of those who were called Pythagoreans, when Aristotle wrote.† Few subjects in ancient times have yielded a heavier crop of mysticism, than what might be gathered from numerous writers, concerning the marvellous powers and relations of numbers.

As is a common case, the pretensions of Marcus were as monstrous as his absurdities. There seems no reason to doubt, or to explain away, the account of Irenæus, according to whom Marcus affirmed, that “the first Quaternity of

* *Histoire des Juifs*, Liv. iii. ch. 11. Tome iii. p. 301, seqq. Ed. 1716. See also Ch. 13.—There is a truly remarkable analogy between the general notions of the Cabbalists respecting the powers of the letters,—an analogy extending even to some of the details into which they entered, as given by Basnage,—and what is stated to be found in the Hindu Tantras. According to a writer in “*The Friend of India*” (Vol. iii. p. 616), it is the doctrine of the Tantras concerning one of the Sanscrit vowels, that “it is an astonishing letter, it is bright as the shell of Vishnoo, it is full of the three gods and of the five souls; it is in fact Bhuguvutee herself.” Of another letter it is said; “The stroke on the left is Bruhma, the lower stroke is Vishnoo; the perpendicular line Shiva; the horizontal, Suruswutee; the curve is Bhuguvutee. The space in the centre is Shiva.” “This letter bestows liberation, it produces wealth and holiness; it is the root of all letters; it is the feminine energy of nature, and the mother of all gods. In the upper angle resides the wife of Bruhma, in the middle angle Vishnoo’s wife Jistha, in the lower Shiva’s wife Roudree; it is the soul of all knowledge; the soul of the four casts, the origin of Bruhma’s power to desire, of Vishnoo’s power to know, and of the active energy of Shiva; therefore is it to be perpetually praised.”—In this manner, it is said by the writer of the article from which I quote, are the character and qualities of all the vowels and consonants described.

† Aristot. *Metaphysic.* Lib. i. capp. 5, 6.

Æons, which is high above all, had descended to him, from places invisible and unspeakable, in the form of a woman,—for, he said, its masculine form the world could not support—and revealed to him its own nature and the origin of all things, which it had never revealed before to any one of the gods or men.” *

Marcus himself, like Simon Magus and Apollonius of Tyana, appears to have belonged to the class of religious mountebanks,—individuals claiming extraordinary inspiration and marvellous powers, who were not very uncommon during the first two centuries of our era; and who, with characters modified by the difference of circumstances, have shown themselves more or less conspicuously at other periods down to our own. According to Irenæus, who represents himself as speaking from personal knowledge, he was an impostor, a man of bad morals, and a pretender to magic.† He claimed, as we have seen, that a revelation had been made to him of a far higher character than that made to Christ. Such being the case, he may have imposed upon and deluded some Christians, who in becoming his followers may not altogether have forfeited their title to the Christian name. But there seems no doubt, that a majority of his sect had no more claim to it than the Carpocratians or the Ophians. The sect, indeed, appears to have been confined in its sphere, and short-lived; for it attracted no attention from any other eminent writer beside Irenæus during the first three centuries.

Having, in what precedes, taken a view of the Gnostic Pleroma, as exhibited by Ptolemy, in its most perfect development, we shall now go on to the formation of things without the Pleroma, still following him as our guide.

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 14. § 1. p. 66.

† Lib. i. c. 13.

CHAPTER VII.

(CONTINUED.)

ON THE PECULIAR SPECULATIONS OF THE THEOSOPHIC
GNOSTICS.

SECTION III.

*On their Speculations concerning the Formation of the Visible
Universe.*

I PROCEED with the system of the Valentinians, as modified by Ptolemy.* In what follows I shall give merely its outline, for it would be useless to dwell on its detail, and shall state a few doubtful and unimportant points in the manner which seems to me most probably correct, without reference to the different opinions that have been maintained.

In consequence, as related in the last Section, of the sufferings of the *Æon Wisdom*, a female abortion was produced by her, that was cast out of the Pleroma. This offspring of *Wisdom* was formless, and devoid of comprehension, but had the spiritual essence of an *Æon*. She was raised (as we shall see) from her imperfect state, and was then called, after her mother, *Wisdom*; but seems more commonly to have been denominated *Achamoth*, a name derived from the Hebrew, signifying *wisdom*. The *Æon Christ*, taking compassion on her, extended himself for her relief over "the Boundary"† of the Pleroma. He gave her form and consciousness; but did

* The account which follows is derived from the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh Chapters of the First Book of Irenæus. The statements of Irenæus are confirmed in great part by the "Doctrina Orientalis," §§ 43-65.

† The *Æon Hores*. See before, p. 245.

not endue her with knowledge. He then withdrew and left her, that she might awaken to a sense of her deprivation in being separated from the Pleroma, and feel an eager longing after higher things. Accordingly, she strove to attain the light by which she had been deserted; but was restrained by the *Æon Horos*. Thus remaining alone, she became the prey of various contending passions, sorrow, fear, perplexity, accompanied with ignorance, and a yearning after him who had given her consciousness.

In these circumstances she implored a renewal of the favor of *Christ*; and he sent the *Æon Saviour* or *Jesus*, to her assistance. This *Æon* separated the passions of Achamoth from her, and mingled them with and united them to primitive matter. Mingled with this, they became the essential forms of matter. At the same time, her yearning after Christ gave being to the substance of all souls, considered as not *spiritual*, but as rational. We have no word in English proper to describe this substance. I shall, therefore, denote it by a term borrowed directly from its epithet in Greek,* and call it "psychical."†

In this manner the elements of things were formed by the *Æon Saviour*, who is accordingly, in one sense, to be considered as the maker of the visible universe; the Valentinians applying to him the words of St. Paul; "For by him were all things created, visible and invisible." Achamoth, in the mean time, had brought forth a substance of the same essence with herself, that is, spiritual. Thus three sorts of substances now existed without the Pleroma, spiritual, psychical, and material. The Saviour gave instructions to Achamoth how to proceed in the work of creation, and departed.

Again left alone, she found herself unable to give form to the spiritual substance which she had produced. Taking therefore the psychical, she fashioned the immediate Creator of the world, the god of the Jews. Under the secret direction of

* *Ψυχικός*.

† Cudworth uses the epithet "soulish."

his mother, of whose existence he was ignorant, and of whose guidance he was unconscious, he became the former of all animal and material things, the God and the Father of the new creation. Through the operation of Achamoth, instructed by the *Æon Saviour*, there resulted a correspondence between the things without and those within the Pleroma; Achamoth, herself, corresponding to the Infinite Being, and the Creator to *the Only Son*.

The Creator made seven heavens,* each informed by an angel; the highest being animated by himself. There can be little doubt (as I have before observed†) that, in the conception of these seven heavens animated by angels, we find the common philosophical notion of the ancients respecting the seven heavenly bodies of our system, which they regarded as the glorious vehicles of divine intelligences ruling over the affairs of this world. But the Valentinians likewise considered those seven angels, together with Achamoth, as corresponding to the first Ogdoad of the *Æons*.‡

Achamoth now dwelt in "the Middle Space" (perhaps the orb of the fixed stars) between the new heavens of the Creator and the Pleroma. The Creator was ignorant of the existence of any beings of a higher order than himself. Having only a psychical, not a spiritual, nature, he wanted power to comprehend what was spiritual. He fancied himself the origin of all things, the only God; and thus announced himself by his prophets of the Old Testament, through whom he said, "I am God, and beside me there is no other." §

I pass over the account given by Irenæus of the notions of Ptolemy respecting the formation of the Devil, which we have before adverted to, and found occasion to regard as essentially incorrect. ||

We come, therefore, next to the creation of Adam. First,

* *Ὀὐρανούς*.

† See before, p. 181.

‡ In this paragraph I depart, in some particulars, too unimportant to be dwelt upon, from the words of Irenæus, and give what, I suppose, must, from the nature of the case, have been the meaning of Ptolemy.

§ See before, pp. 171, 172.

|| See before, p. 203, seqq.

an *earthy* substance was formed by the Creator, not, however, of the dust of the earth, but of invisible, floating matter. This was a soul, or principle of life, similar to that of brutes. Into this vehicle the Creator breathed a rational (psychical) soul of the same essence with himself; and the whole was afterward clothed with a covering of flesh, a body formed of the earth. But into the rational soul which proceeded from the Creator, Achamoth, unknown to him, infused a portion of the spiritual substance which she had produced, a leaven of immortality, a spirit.

From Adam, thus formed, proceeded three races of men, corresponding to the three parts of his *incorporeal* nature; the *earthy* and irrational, as Cain; the *psychical*, or rational, as Abel; and the *spiritual*, as Seth; the spiritual principle being always derived from Achamoth. The first are from their nature destined to perish; the second have the power of choice, and, as they incline themselves to good or evil, may be saved or lost: the last, as spiritual, are secure of obtaining the blessedness of the Pleroma. To this class the theosophic Gnostics regarded themselves as belonging. From their spiritual nature, which was superior to that of the Creator, they were capable of understanding the mysteries which they taught, and of which he had been ignorant. Other Christians belonged to the second class. These were to attain salvation by simple faith and good works.

In reference, I suppose, to the communication by Achamoth of the spiritual principle to men, by which they became inspired, the name "Holy Spirit" was given her by the Valentinians.

To remedy the disorders and evils, of which he himself was sensible, the Creator had determined to send a Saviour. Him he had predicted by the Jewish prophets. But to restore the order of the universe, a higher interposition was necessary than that of the Creator. At the baptism of his Christ, the *Æon Saviour* descended into him in the form of a dove, and became the true Saviour of the world.

In the consummation of the present state of things, Achamoth will be restored to the Pleroma; and the Creator will take her present seat, "the Middle Space." The spiritual, or rather their *spirits*, divested of their *souls*, will enter the Pleroma, and be united as brides to the angels attendant on the *Æon Saviour*. The rational (psychical), who have secured their salvation by faith and good works, will enter the future realm of the Creator, where, likewise, the *souls* of the spiritual will remain.

From the first, those souls which had received the spiritual seed, implanted by Achamoth, had manifested their superiority over all others. Though the Creator was ignorant of the cause of their excellence, they were objects of his peculiar favor. He constituted them prophets, priests, and kings. Thus the words uttered by his prophets (the Jewish prophets) did not all proceed from the Creator; that spiritual principle, which he could not give, spoke in them. Their declarations, therefore, are to be divided into two classes, according to the source from which they proceeded. In like manner, the words uttered by the man Jesus, sometimes proceeded from the *Æon Saviour*, sometimes from the spiritual principle derived from Achamoth, and sometimes from the Creator.

But, though the operations of the spiritual principle in men had been remarked by the Creator before the descent of the *Æon Saviour* from the Pleroma, and though he had been moved by these appearances, yet he treated them with neglect, and imagined various causes for the effects produced. "When, however, the Saviour came, he learned all things from him, and, with his whole attendant host, joyfully welcomed him. The Creator was typified by the Centurion in the Gospel, who says to the Saviour, *For I also have soldiers and servants under my authority, and they do what I command*. He will carry on the government of the world, as long as is requisite, especially for the purpose of taking charge of the Church; and likewise with a view to the reward prepared for him, with which he has been made ac-

quainted, a removal into the place where his mother dwells." The Valentinians also affirmed, "that Simeon, who *took Christ in his arms and gave thanks, and said, Lord, now dost thou dismiss thy servant in peace, according to thy word*, was a type of the Creator, who upon the coming of the Saviour was made aware of his future translation, and gave thanks to the Unknown God." *

After what has been already said, the scheme explained in this Chapter affords no occasion for any particular remark. But it may be observed, that the Valentinians adduced in its support many passages from the Gospels and Epistles, in which, after the fashion of their day, they found a hidden sense. Of the manner in which they used such passages the application of those just quoted affords a favorable specimen.

We have, thus, gone over those opinions of the theosophic Gnostics, which it is necessary to consider apart. We will next attend to the opinions both of the theosophic Gnostics, and of the Marcionites, concerning the person of Christ, which may best be viewed in connection with each other.

* The words above quoted are taken from Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 7. § 4. pp. 34, 35; and Lib. i. c. 8. § 4. p. 40. Tertullian gives the same statement, *Advers. Valentin.* c. 28. p. 260. It corresponds, likewise, with what Origen (*Comment. in Joan. T.* 13. *Opp.* iv. p. 274, seqq.), has quoted from the Valentinian, Heracleon, and with what is found in the *Doctrina Orientalis* (§§ 62-65). I refer to these authorities, because the account of Mosheim, in his *Commentarii de Rebus Christianorum*, which is similar to that given by him in his *Ecclesiastical History*, is altogether erroneous. After speaking in the former work (p. 384) of the union of the *Æon Jesus* with Christ (the Christ of the Creator) he says; "This divine man strenuously attacked the tyranny of the Creator of the World and his associates, by discourses, miracles, and invectives; and taught men the knowledge of the Supreme Divinity, and the means of procuring the salvation of that soul in which are the senses and lusts. Exasperated by this, the Architect of the World caused him to be apprehended and crucified."—See before, p. 173, note.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE OPINIONS OF THE GNOSTICS CONCERNING THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

THE Gnostics generally believed that Christ had not a proper body of flesh and blood. This belief, as I have already said, was a consequence of their opinion respecting the evil nature of the body.* A proper human body was thought by them inconsistent with the perfect purity of the Saviour. But the Marcionites and theosophic Gnostics, while they agreed in this fundamental doctrine, differed in their other opinions respecting his person.

The nativity of Christ was denied by Marcion. He regarded it as wholly unworthy of the Divine Saviour to have passed through all the circumstances attendant on birth and infancy.† Christ, according to him, was the Son, the Spirit, the Power, the Messenger, the Christ, of the Unknown God.‡ The gospel used by Marcion was that of Luke mutilated by him; § and, rejecting all the previous history, he began with the appearance of the Saviour in the synagogue at Capernaum. He was then manifested in this inferior world, not a man, but a divine being.|| His apparent body was a mere phantom. A human body, beside its corrupt nature, must have been derived from the Creator, with whom Marcion (unlike the theosophic Gnostics) maintained, that his Christ had nothing in common. He taught, that the Creator had pro-

* See before, p. 203.

† Tertullian. *Advers. Marcion*. Lib. iii. c. 11. pp. 402, 403. *De Carne Christi*, c. 4. p. 309.

‡ Tertullian. *Advers. Marcion*. Lib. iii. c. 3. p. 397. Lib. iv. c. 21. p. 436.

§ See Additional Note, G.

|| Tertullian. *Advers. Marcion*. Lib. iv. c. 7. pp. 416, 417. c. 21. p. 436.

mised to his peculiar people, the Jews, a Messiah, of his own ; but that the advent of this Messiah had been anticipated, and his place preoccupied, by the manifestation of the Unknown God in Christ.*

Apelles, a disciple of Marcion, though he denied the nativity of Christ, held that he had a real but not a human body.† So far as we may conclude from our imperfect information, the generality of the theosophic Gnostics admitted, in like manner, the reality of his body, and, with this, his nativity also in a certain sense. Many of them appear to have adopted the essential features of a scheme often brought into view by Irenæus.‡ According to this scheme, the *Æon Saviour* (who, it is to be remembered, was also called *Christ*,) descended from the Pleroma into the Messiah of the Creator, the seeming man Jesus, at the baptism of the latter, and through him announced the Unknown God. In speaking of this complex being, the *Æon* seems to have been commonly called *Christ*; the man, *Jesus*. Jesus, having been intended by the Creator for his Messiah, his body had been prepared, in a wonderful manner, of the psychical substance, so as to be free from all the impurities of matter. His *soul* was derived from the Creator; but there was a spiritual principle within him (a spirit) furnished by Achamoth. As regards his nativity, he passed through Mary, his mother, as water through a conduit, without receiving any thing from her substance. When taken before Pilate the *Æon Christ* left him. The spirit furnished by Achamoth likewise left him at his crucifixion; and only the psychical part of the complex Saviour, the body and soul of Jesus, suffered.

The opinion of the theosophic Gnostics concerning the body of Christ, as not a proper human body, though one

* See before, p. 173.

† Tertullian. *De Carne Christi*, c. 6. p. 311. *Advers. Marcion*. Lib. iii. c. 11. p. 403.

‡ *Cont. Hæres*. Lib. i. c. 6. § 1. pp. 28, 29. c. 7. § 2. pp. 32, 33. c. 9. § 3. p. 45. Lib. iii. c. 2. § 2. p. 175. c. 9. § 3. p. 184. c. 10. § 4. p. 186. c. 11. §§ 1, 3, 7. pp. 188-190. c. 16. p. 204, seqq.

capable of suffering, was an hypothesis in no way affecting the historical accounts of him. But it may be thought that the doctrine of the Marcionites, who conceived of his apparent body as a phantom, must have led them to reject much that is related in the Gospels.

As I have mentioned, Marcion denied the nativity of Jesus, and rejected, in consequence, the first three chapters of Luke's Gospel, the only gospel which he used. But he did not call in question the actions, miracles, and apparent sufferings of Christ, as recorded by the Evangelist. He viewed those accounts as a true narrative of what appeared to the senses of men. Regarding the supposed prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Jewish Messiah, as inapplicable to the true Christ, he relied on his miracles alone as proof of his divine authority. In his view, no order in successive dispensations of the Supreme God, no preparation for the coming of his Christ, was required. "You affirm," says Tertullian, "that no order of that sort was necessary, as he was immediately to prove himself by facts, by the evidence of his powers, to be the son and messenger and Christ of God." * Marcion, likewise, received the accounts of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ, equally with the accounts of the transactions of his ministry. His admission of the truth of this part of the Gospel-history is often referred to by Tertullian. Marcion, indeed, reasoned from it to prove, that the Christ in whom he believed was not the Messiah who had been promised to the Jews by their Creator-god; "denying that it had been predicted that the Christ of the Creator should suffer on the cross, and arguing further, that it was not credible, that the Creator should subject *his* son to that kind of death on which he had himself pronounced a curse; saying, *Cursed is every one who has hung on wood.*" †

* Advers. Marcion. Lib. iii. c. 3. p. 397.

† Ibid. Lib. iii. c. 18. p. 407.—The quotation from the Old Testament, which I give conformably to the words in Tertullian (*Maledictus omnis qui pependerit in ligno*), is to be found in Deuteronomy xxi. 23. This passage is also used by St. Paul, Galatians iii. 13.

In different passages Tertullian insists, that there was no reason why Marcion should deny the nativity of Christ, on the ground of its being unworthy of the divine nature to be born, seeing that he admitted his crucifixion.* Referring to, and misapplying, the words of St. Paul (to which, as I have before said,† he often appealed), “God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise,” he maintains, that it was not more foolish in the view of human wisdom for a divine being to be born than to be crucified. According to Marcion, he says,‡ “the nativity of Christ is dishonorable to God and unworthy of the Son of God, and foolish.” “But God,” he replies, “*has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise* ;” and he then proceeds to speak thus of the crucifixion.

“Clearly, there are other things as foolish, relating to the contumely and sufferings endured by the divine nature. Or shall I call it agreeable to reason, that a divine being should be crucified? § Expunge this, too, Marcion ; or, rather, expunge this in the first place. For which is more unworthy of a divine being, which is more shameful, to be born or to die? To bear about flesh, or to bear a cross? to be circumcised, or

* Beside the passage to be immediately quoted, see *Advers. Marcion. Lib. iii. c. 11. p. 403.*

† See before, pp. 154, 155.

‡ *De Carne Christi, capp. 4, 5. pp. 309, 310.*

§ “*Sunt plane et alia tam stulta quæ pertinent ad contumelias et passiones dei. Aut prudentiam dicam [non dicant] deum crucifixum?*”—To translate the word *deus* by our word *God*, in these and subsequent passages of this extract, would be imputing to Tertullian a sense which he would have regarded with horror. See his work *Adversus Praxeam, passim.* See also p. 152, seqq.—“*Sermo Dei*,” says Tertullian, “*deus, quia ex Deo, non tamen ipse ex quo est.*” “The Logos of God is a *divine being* [*verbally* God] because he is from God, yet he is not that being from whom he is.” *Advers. Praxeam, c. 26. p. 515.*

It was with very indeterminate, inconsistent, and changing conceptions, that Tertullian, and the other early fathers, applied the name *god* to the Logos or Christ, whom, as a person, they regarded as far inferior to God. But they gave him this name on the ground of his being an attribute of God, his deriving, as a person, his substance from God, and his acting as the minister and representative of God. I have had occasion elsewhere (“*Statement of Reasons*,” pp. 280, 281,) to advert to this subject. See Additional Note, H.

to be pierced with nails? to be brought forth, or to be buried? to be laid in a manger, or in a tomb? You would be wiser, if you disbelieved all this likewise. But you will not be wise, unless you become a fool to the world by believing the foolish things of God. Have you spared the account of the sufferings of Christ, because, being a phantom, he felt them not? I have already said, that he might equally submit to the empty indignities of an imaginary birth and infancy." *

* Though it is not necessary to my purpose, I am tempted to pursue the quotation a little further. The passage is a remarkable one. Tertullian goes on thus; "But now answer me this, destroyer of the Truth! Was not the divine Saviour really crucified? Did he not really die, as he was really crucified? Was he not really raised again to life, as he really died? Did Paul falsely determine to know nothing among us but Jesus crucified? ^a Did he falsely teach that he was buried, and falsely insist on his resurrection? Then our faith is false; and all we hope from Christ a phantom. Most wicked of men! Excuser of deicides! For Christ suffered nothing from his enemies, if he did not really suffer. Spare the only hope of the world, thou destroyer of the necessary dishonor of the Faith.^b Whatever was unworthy of a divine being was for my good. I am safe, if I am not ashamed of my Lord. *Of him*, he says, *who has been ashamed of me, will I be ashamed.* Fortunate in my want of shame,^c happy in my folly, I find nothing else which can put me to the blush. The Son of God was born; ^d—it is shameful, and, therefore, I am not ashamed of it. And the Son of God died;—it is altogether credible, because it is absurd. And he was buried and rose again;—it is certain, because it is impossible."

The meaning of Tertullian in the last sentences may be thus explained. God, he argues, has, through the Apostle, avowed that he has chosen what is foolish in the view of men to confound the wise. Do you then refuse to admit the nativity of Christ, because it may seem to you dishonorable for the Son of God, the Divine Saviour, to be born? Or is his *real* crucifixion to be disbelieved, because it may appear absurd to men to assert that such a being died? Or is the proper fact of his resurrection to be rejected, because it may appear impossible to men, that a dead body should return to life? On the contrary, these things, including his nativity, are in truth the foolish things which God has spoken of as characteristic of his dispensation. I believe them the more firmly, because, so far as they

^a Rigault gives this sentence thus; "Falso ergo statuit inter nos scire Paulus tantum Jesum crucifixum." Instead of "Falso ergo statuit," I adopt the reading "Falso statuit," and understand this and the following sentence as interrogative.

^b Rigault's text is; "Quid destruis necessarium dedecus fidei?" Instead of "Quid destruis," I adopt the reading "Qui destruis," without an interrogation.

^c For "bene imprudentem," I adopt the reading "bene impudentem."

^d For "Crucifixus est Dei filius," I adopt the reading "Natus est Dei filius."

Before quitting this subject, we will take notice of a remarkable passage of Origen, in which he in some degree countenances an opinion quite as extraordinary, to say the least, as that of the Marcionites. It is found in the Latin translation of his Commentaries on Matthew.* But there can be no reasonable doubt, that it was originally written by him, not interpolated by his translator. He is commenting on the fact, that Judas, when betraying his master, pointed him out by a kiss to those who accompanied him; the fact being considered by Origen as implying that they might not otherwise have known his person.† His words, considerably abridged, are as follows :

“A tradition has come down to us, that Jesus had not only two forms, that in which he was seen by all, and that in which he was seen by his disciples at his transfiguration; but seem to men dishonorable, foolish, and impossible, so far they coincide with the avowed purpose of God. They bear the very character which he has ascribed to the means used by him to confound the wise. What are those foolish things, Tertullian asks immediately before, to which the words of the Apostle may apply? “The conversion of men to the worship of the true God? the rejection of error? the forming men to righteousness, chastity, patience, mercy, innocence?—These are not foolish things. Search out what the Apostle referred to, and if you have reason to suppose that you have found it, then it will no longer seem foolish to you to believe^a that a divine being was born, and born of a virgin, and with a body of flesh.”

The words, “Certum est, quia impossibile,” “It is certain, because it is impossible,” have been often quoted, with some change (“Credo, quia impossibile,” “I believe, because it is impossible”) ironically, with a cast of ridicule on Tertullian. In the last sentences adduced from him, his vehement eloquence has broken down the common barriers of language; but it seems to be treating him hardly, to give a verbal meaning to his over-bold and very concise expressions, in order to convert them into absurdities.

The whole passage is one of the many, before referred to (see p. 256), in which he, Justin Martyr, and Irenæus, express clearly and strongly their belief of the sufferings of the Logos.

* Series Comment. in Matth. § 100. Opp. iii. 906.

† Many of them probably did not know his person, as Jesus during his ministry was but very little, comparatively, at Jerusalem; others might not readily have distinguished him by torch-light amid the darkness and confusion.

^a For “non erit tam stultum quam credere,” I adopt the reading “non erit jam stultum credere.”

that he appeared to every one in the form of which he was worthy; and that (at times) when present, he appeared to all like another person.* Thus he resembled the manna, which had a different taste for different individuals, accommodated to every man's liking.† And this tradition does not seem to me incredible. But if it were so, we may explain, why the multitude who accompanied Judas, though they had often seen Jesus, nevertheless needed some one familiar with him to point him out to them, on account of the changes of his form."

This extraordinary tradition does not appear to have dwelt on the mind of Origen; for he never elsewhere mentions it in his remaining works; but it presents a conception that may seem even stranger than that of the Marcionites.‡ The passage, however, well deserves attention; especially in connection with their doctrine,—which existed before the middle of the second century. Taken together, they serve to show with what fables and strange imaginations the history of Jesus would have been mingled, had it not, at an early period, been fixed in its true form by the authentic records of his contemporary disciples. They are among those collateral evidences (hereafter to be discussed), which, taken alone, afford irresistible proof, that the Gospels were not compilations of a later period than that assigned for their origin. If the histories of Christ had been founded upon traditions existing among the Gentile Christians after their separation from the Jewish Christians, that is, after the apostolic age; then, instead of bearing the character which they now have, they would have

* "Sed etiam unicuique apparebat secundum quod fuerat dignus. Et cum fuisset ipse, quasi non ipse omnibus videbatur."

† This notion respecting the manna was derived by Origen from what is said in the Wisdom of Solomon, ch. xvi. 20, 21.

‡ The story referred to by Origen is likewise mentioned by Photius (in the ninth century), as having been found by him in a book called "Circuits (Περίοδοι) of the Apostles," professedly written by an author of the name of Leucius Charinus. In that book it was connected with the opinion of the Marcionites, and subsequently of the Manichæans, that the apparent body of Christ was only a phantom. Fabricii Codex Apocryphus Nov. Test. Ed. 1719. Tom. ii. p. 770, seqq. Jones on the Canonical Authority of the N. T. Ed. 1798. Vol. i. pp. 247, 248.

been not only irreconcilable with each other, but disfigured by such traditions as that preserved by Origen, and such conceptions as that of Marcion. The growth of fables respecting our Saviour, which was blasted by the existence of the Gospels, would have been rank without it; and each compiler of a history would have selected from relations true or false, what was accommodated to his own belief or imaginations respecting Christianity and its founder. Marcion, for example, instead of mutilating, as he did, the Gospel of Luke, and using that alone, would have constructed a gospel of his own, much more favorable to his opinions than any thing he could derive from Luke.

We will next consider what were the views of the Gnostics concerning the general design of Christianity, or, in other words, the purpose of the interposition of the True God, by Christ.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE OPINIONS OF THE GNOSTICS RESPECTING THE
DESIGN OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE subject of this Chapter, however important to be attended to, in order that we may form a correct estimate of the Gnostics, requires little explanation or discussion. It does not appear that the Christian Gnostics, as a body, differed *essentially* from the Catholic Christians in their general views of the design of Christianity. We, accordingly, have no remains of any controversy between the two parties concerning this subject.

It may, or may not, be regarded as a qualification of these remarks, that the theosophic Gnostics were distinguished from the catholic Christians by maintaining the doctrine of the natural division of men into three classes, one secure of future blessedness in the Pleroma, another to be rewarded or punished by the Creator according to their deserts, and the third formed to perish.* But they ascribed (I speak of the more respectable and sober of their number) a moral efficacy, and, as far as appears, a moral efficacy alone, to the Christian dispensation. It was, in their view, a manifestation of the Unknown God, of the True God, to reveal himself and his purposes to men, to deliver them from the power of moral evil, and to form "the spiritual" and "the rational" (psychical), for the happiness of which they were respectively capable.

The doctrine, that "the spiritual" were, by their nature, secure of future blessedness, was, undoubtedly, liable to be greatly abused; and, considering the condition of the times, we have no reason to doubt, that in many individuals it led

* See before, p. 266.

to such irregularities as were charged on the theosophic Gnostics. Doctrines, different from it in form, but the same in effect, have prevailed in modern times ; and in periods of great excitement, as in Germany at the time of the Reformation, and among the fanatics in England in the seventeenth century, they have been followed by like disastrous consequences. But, during ordinary seasons, other principles and other influences, acting upon the minds of those by whom they are held, oppose and control their dangerous tendency.

It does not appear, that the Marcionites adopted the notion of the theosophic Gnostics concerning the natural division of men into three classes. This world they regarded as evil ; its ruler as of a character diverse from, and in some respects contrary to, that of the Supreme God ; and all connection with it through the pleasures of the senses, as polluting. In their view the Supreme God had interposed to enable men to deliver themselves from the realm of the Creator, and to attain to a far better state. This deliverance was to be effected by cultivating their spiritual nature, by the practice of Christian virtue, and, especially, by what, in their opinion, formed an essential part of it, ascetic morality, and an abstinence from worldly pleasures. Thus were men to separate themselves from the world and its ruler. The *Good* God did not punish ; but, with regard to the final lot of those not admitted to his spiritual world, our information is too imperfect to enable us to complete the scheme of Marcion.

The belief of the theosophic Gnostics, that the *Æon* Christ left the man Jesus before his crucifixion, and that of the Marcionites, that the seeming body of Christ was a phantom, incapable of suffering, make it evident, that they could have had no notion of the doctrine of Atonement as it appears in modern creeds, a doctrine which theologians have represented as the distinguishing feature of Christianity. But on this subject there was no controversy between them and the early

catholic Christians, to whom the doctrine was equally unknown.

The theosophic Gnostics have been compared with those religionists in our own times, who maintain that the objects of faith may be felt, or may be discerned, by each individual mind, without the aid of Revelation, the belief in which they consequently reject. But the spiritual intuition, claimed by the Gnostics for themselves alone, had no agreement with this doctrine. It corresponds rather to the exclusive pretension to a supernatural faith, which many other Christian sects have set up since their time. From those modern religionists, the Gnostics were likewise very widely separated by the fundamental distinction, that they recognised in Christianity a character altogether supernatural. They regarded it as a manifestation of the Supreme God, in which his glory had, for the first time, irradiated this lower world;—as a miraculous interposition of the most extraordinary character. They were, therefore, as strongly distinguished as any Christians from all those speculatists, who reject the belief, that Christianity is a revelation from God.

But how was it possible, that the Gnostics could reconcile their peculiar doctrines with the teachings of Christ? This is a question to which we will attend in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER X.

OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GNOSTICS RECONCILED
THEIR DOCTRINES WITH CHRISTIANITY.

IN comparing the peculiar doctrines of the Gnostics with the teaching of Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, or with the Christian Scriptures generally, the question naturally arises; How could they imagine those doctrines to have been taught by the Master whom they professed to follow, or identify them in any way with Christianity? We may, at first view, be inclined strongly to suspect, that they held the common histories of Christ, and the other books of the New Testament, in no esteem; and, to adopt the inference of Gibbon, that "it was impossible that the Gnostics could receive our present Gospels."*

But, on further attention to the subject, we may perceive, that there is nothing peculiar in the case of the Gnostics. Their systems have long been obsolete; they are foreign from our thoughts and imaginations; and, in comparing them with the systems of other sects, we are apt to measure their relative distance from Christianity, by their relative distance from the forms of Christian belief with which we are familiar. Of opinions equally false, those with which we have long been acquainted seem to us much less extraordinary, than such as are newly presented to our minds. In inquiring, therefore, how the Gnostics could mistake their doctrines for the doctrines of Christianity, the first consideration to be attended to is the fact, that their mistake was not greater than that which has been committed by a large majority of the professed disciples of Christ. The faith of the whole Christian world for ten centuries before the Reforma-

* See before p. 6.

tion had no advantage over that of the Gnostics, in being more accordant with reason and Christianity. The gross, literal errors and absurdities, maintained by the Catholics of this period, are in as strong contrast with the truths of our religion, as the mystic extravagances of the early heretics. The system by which the Catholic faith was supplanted among Protestants, with its doctrines concerning the threefold personality of God, and concerning God's government of his creatures; with its representations of the totally depraved nature, capable only of moral evil, with which he brings men into being; with its scheme of redemption required by man's utter misery and helplessness; its infinite satisfaction to the justice of God the Father, made by the sufferings of God the Son; and its "horrible decrees" * may, perhaps, appear to a rational believer of the present day to stand in as open and direct opposition to Christianity as the systems of the leading Gnostics. Or, to come down to a later period, the hypotheses and expositions by which the Gnostics reconciled their conceptions with the declarations of Christ and his Apostles, could not, as many will think, be more irrational and extravagant, than the hypotheses and expositions of that modern school of German theologians, who, admitting the authenticity of the Gospels, find nothing supernatural in the history, but explain, as conformable to the common laws of nature, events, which, according to their theory, have, from the time of their occurrence to the present day, been *mistaken* for miracles. I refer to the opinions of large bodies of Christians, or of men claiming to be called Christians; and to speculations, which have been defended by such as were, or have been reputed to be, learned and able. It is not neces-

* I borrow the expression from a well known passage of Calvin. "Unde factum est, ut tot gentes una cum liberis eorum infantibus æternæ morti involveret lapsus Adæ absque remedio, nisi quia Deo ita visum est? Decretum quidem horrible fateor:"—"Whence is it, that the fall of Adam involved so many nations with their infant children in eternal death without remedy, except that it so seemed good to God? It is a horrible decree, I confess." Institut. Lib. iii. c. 23. § 7.

sary to pursue the illustration by adverting to the doctrines of smaller sects. I will only observe further, as the case seems to me particularly analogous, that the disciples of Swedenborg are believers in our religion, that they have their full share of the Christian virtues, and that they have reckoned among their number, men of more than common powers of mind; while he, who rejects the systems both of Ptolemy and of Swedenborg, will probably think, that there is no reason for preferring one to the other, on account of its being the more rational faith, or having a better foundation in the Gospels.

Whatever opinions a thinking man may entertain of Christianity, or of religion unconnected with Christianity, when he compares them with those which have existed, or are existing, among mankind, he will find himself in a small minority. Whoever may really have attained to the

“bene munita,

“Edita doctrinâ sapientum, templa serena,”

to the *serene temples, well fortified, built up by the learning of the wise,*

“Despicere unde queas alios, passimque videre
Errare atque viam palenteis quærere vitæ,”

will assuredly not find them thronged; and from their height, he will see not a few others wandering in errors as extravagant as those of the Gnostics.

Such have, for many centuries, been the doctrines of the larger portion of the professed followers of Christ, that Faith has been formally disconnected from Reason; and reason, or, as the term is usually qualified, *human* reason, has been represented as its dangerous enemy. From the time of the Gnostics to our own there has always been a very numerous class, composed of individuals, who have held different and opposite tenets, but who have all in common appealed, in some form or other, to an inward sense, a spiritual discernment, infallible in its perceptions, surpassing the powers of the understanding,

and superseding their use. "The natural man," says St. Paul, meaning the unconverted, him who rejected revelation, "receives not the truths of the spirit of God ; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them ; because they are spiritually discerned ;"* that is to say, spiritual things, the truths taught by Christianity, are to be discerned only through the light which Christianity affords. But the words of the Apostle were early perverted by the theosophic Gnostics ;† and there are none that have been more commonly or more mischievously abused. One main occasion of the existence, not only of the Gnostics, but of other sects of religionists, has been the vanity of belonging to a spiritual aristocracy, from which good sense, learning, and rational piety, only form a ground of exclusion. Those Gnostics, with their pretence to spiritual discernment, had no more difficulty than later sects in finding what they looked for in the teachings of Christ.

The ease with which different parties among Christians have discovered apparent support for doctrines the most irrational, has been essentially connected with a fundamental error respecting the nature of those writings which compose the Old and New Testaments. Conformably to what I have before had occasion to remark, all these writings, so different in character and value, have been represented as constituting the Revelation from God. They have been ascribed to God as their proper author ; the human writers being considered only as agents under his immediate direction. When, therefore, all these different writers, with all their imperfect and erroneous conceptions, were thus transformed into infallible divine instructors, there is no wonder that their words, even if correctly understood, should afford support for many errors. But, beside the direct consequence of this fundamental misapprehension, there has been an indirect consequence, not less important, which particularly shows itself in the case of the Gnostics. The words contained in the books of the Old

* 1 Corinthians ii. 14.

† Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 8. § 3. p. 39.

and New Testaments, being regarded as the words not of men but of God, the rational principles of interpretation, which would apply to them as the words of men, have been set aside. These principles would lead us to study the respective characters of the authors of those books, and the various influences which were acting upon them, and to make ourselves acquainted with the particular occasion and purpose of their different writings, and with the characters, circumstances, opinions, errors, and modes of expression, of those for whom their writings were immediately intended ; and, when we had thus enabled ourselves, as far as possible, to sympathize with them, we should determine their meaning with a constant regard to the considerations which we had thus grouped together. But such knowledge is foreign from the purpose, if the books to be explained are not properly the works of human authors. It has, accordingly, been disregarded. The essential elements and rules of a correct interpretation have been neglected ; and the work of explaining the Scriptures has been denied to reason and judgment, and delivered over to men's preconceptions, caprices, imaginations, and spiritual discernment. The consequence has been, that, in the performance of this work, we may find all varieties of error, from the wildest allegories and Cabalistic follies, down to the imposition of verbal meanings which are verbal or moral absurdities. The false modes of interpretation, common in their day, afforded the theosophic Gnostics, as false modes of interpretation have afforded later sects, a ready means of apparently reconciling their opinions with the Scriptures.

Every one acquainted with theological controversy must be familiar with the fact, that, in defending doctrines contrary to the teaching of Christ, a few texts are seized upon, the words of which, when standing alone, admit an interpretation favorable to those doctrines ; and that their defenders, fixing their attention on these texts, are able to close their eyes to the whole opposing tenor of the New Testament. But the Gnostics could have been in no want of such texts as might

readily be accommodated to the support of their fundamental doctrine, that the God of the Jews was not the God of Christians. Marcion wrote a work on this subject, which he entitled "Antitheses," the main object of which was to point out the contrariety between the representations given by Christ of his Father, and those given of God in the Old Testament.* The opposition between Christianity and some of the views of religion and morals presented in the Pentateuch (which I have had occasion to remark), furnished the Gnostics with a storehouse of arguments from Scripture. As regards another principal point, the claim set up by the theosophic Gnostics to be by nature the chosen, or the elect, of God, as being *the spiritual*, they could have found no more difficulty in supporting their pretensions from the New Testament, than any of those, who, since their day, have claimed to be elected as the spiritual through a decree of God, irrespective of any merits of their own. Similar modes of misinterpretation would apply as well in the one case as the other, and furnish a similar harvest of apparent proofs.

After these general remarks, we will proceed to consider more particularly the means by which the Gnostics reconciled their doctrines with their Christian faith. The inquiry is one of particular interest on account of the proof which it affords, that the Gnostics had no other Gospel-history than that which was common to them with the catholic Christians and with ourselves; and that, together with the catholic Christians, they used some one, or all, of our present Gospels, as the only document or documents of any value respecting the ministry of Christ.

In the first place, then, the theosophic Gnostics, in common with the catholic Christians, applied the allegorical mode of interpretation to the New Testament. Neglecting the proper

* Tertullian. Advers. Marcion. Lib. i. c. 19. p. 374. Lib. iv. c. 1. p. 413. c. 6. p. 416.

meaning of words, they educed from them mystical senses. Of these, I have already, in the course of this work, produced examples; and many more are given by their early opponents, particularly by Irenæus. This afforded a ready means of accommodating the language of the New Testament to their conceptions. But their whole system of interpretation was, beside, arbitrary, and unsupported by any correct principles. The vocabulary of the theosophic Gnostics, like that of other erring sects, consisted, in great part, of words from the New Testament, on which they had imposed new senses. The names of the *Æons* most frequently mentioned were borrowed from the New Testament; and as the same name was applied by them to different individuals,—as the name of God, for example, both to the Gnostic Creator and to the Supreme Being, and that of Jesus both to the *Æon* so named, and to the man, Jesus,—it thus became easy for them, on the one hand, to find supposed references to their theory, and, on the other, to explain away much that was inconsistent with it. Like other false expositors of Scripture, they detached particular passages from their connection, and infused a foreign meaning into the words. Irenæus, after saying that they appealed to unwritten tradition as a source of their knowledge, goes on to remark, that, “twisting, according to the proverb, a rope of sand, they endeavour to accommodate in a plausible manner to their doctrines, the parables of the Lord, the declarations of the Prophets, or the words of the Apostles, so that their fiction may not seem to be without proof. But they neglect the order and connection of the Scriptures, and disjoin, as far as they are able, the members of the truth. They transpose and refashion, and, making one thing out of another, they deceive many by a fabricated show of the words of the Lord which they put together.”* The Gnostics, according to him, in thus putting together proofs from Scripture, resembled one, who, taking a mosaic representing a

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 8. § 1. p. 36.—For σοφίᾳ in the last sentence, I adopt the reading παντασίᾳ or παντάσμενι. See Massuet's note.

king, should separate the stones, and then form them into the likeness of a dog or a fox.* He afterwards compares them to those who made centos from lines of Homer, by which some story was told altogether foreign from any thing in his works.† They allowed, he says, that the unknown God, and the transactions within the Pleroma, “were not plainly declared by the Saviour, because all had not capacity to receive such knowledge; but, to those who were able to understand them, they were signified by him mystically and in parables.”‡

In addition to these modes of interpretation, the theosophic Gnostics likewise maintained a principle similar to a fundamental doctrine of the Roman Catholics, namely, that religious truth could not be learned from the Scriptures alone, without the aid of the oral instructions of Christ and his Apostles, as preserved by tradition. “When,” says Irenæus, “they are confuted by proofs from the Scriptures, they turn and accuse the Scriptures themselves, as if they were not correct, nor of authority; they say that they contain contradictions, and that the truth cannot be discovered from them by those who are ignorant of tradition. For that it was not delivered in writing, but orally; whence Paul said, ‘We *speak* wisdom among the perfect, but not the wisdom of this world.’”§ “The heretics,” says Tertullian, “pretend that the Apostles did not reveal all things to all, but taught some doctrines openly to every one, some secretly and to a few only.”|| What was peculiar in their own doctrines they regarded as that esoteric teaching which had come down to them by oral tradition. Conformably to this, the Gnostics, in particular cases, pointed out certain individuals, supposed disciples of the Apostles, from whom their

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 8. § 1. p. 36.

† Lib. i. c. 9. § 4. pp. 45, 46.

‡ Lib. i. c. 3. § 1. p. 14. Lib. ii. c. 10. § 1. p. 126. Lib. ii. c. 27. § 2. p. 155.

§ Lib. iii. c. 2. § 1. p. 174.

|| De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, cap. 25. p. 210.

leaders had received their systems. Thus Valentinus was said to have been taught by Theodas, an acquaintance of Paul, and Basilides by Glaucias, a companion of Peter.* It would seem, likewise, from a single passage in Clement of Alexandria, that the Gnostics, generally, boasted that their opinions were favored by Matthias,† who was chosen an Apostle in the place of Judas.‡ Though the remark is not made by Clement, yet it is evident that this appeal to the authority of a particular Apostle,—one, of whom scarcely any thing is now known, and of whom it follows that scarcely any thing was known in the second century,—proves that the Gnostics did not appeal with any confidence to the authority of the other Apostles.

Irenæus earnestly opposes the doctrine of a secret oral tradition.§ But it was maintained by Clement as expressly and fully as by the Gnostics. It was altogether consistent with his conceptions, before explained, that the more recondite truths of philosophy were to be exhibited under a veil, and not to be communicated to the generality. This higher knowledge, the philosophy of Christianity, to which he gave the same name (*γνῶσις*) which the Gnostics gave to their speculations, he supposed was to be attained only by those who were in his view *true* Gnostics (*γνωστικοί*), that is, truly enlightened. The greater number of Christians had only simple Faith, faith in the essential truths of Christianity, which was sufficient for them. On this Faith, as its foundation, all higher knowledge rested.|| It was the notion of Clement, that the secret wisdom of which he speaks was first communicated by our Lord to Peter, James, John, and Paul, from whom it had been transmitted.¶ “Our Lord,” he says, “did not at once reveal to many those truths which did not

* Clement. Al. Stromat. vii. § 17. p. 898.

† Ibid. p. 900.

‡ Acts i. 26.

§ Cont. Hæres. Lib. iii. c. 2-4. pp. 174-179.

|| See, among other passages to this effect, Stromat. vii. pp. 890, 891.

¶ Stromat. i. p. 322. Etiam apud Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib. ii. c. 1.

belong to many, but he revealed them to a few to whom he knew them to be adapted, who were capable of receiving them, and of being conformed to them. But secret things, as God [meaning, I conceive, philosophical speculations concerning God], are committed not to writing, but to oral discourses.”*

This notion of a *secret* tradition is not found in Justin Martyr, Irenæus, or Tertullian. When the two latter speak of tradition, they mean, that traditionary knowledge of the history and doctrines of Christianity which necessarily existed among Christians. It is described by Irenæus, as a “tradition manifest throughout the world, and to be found in every church.”† By it, he says, a knowledge of our religion was preserved without books among believers in barbarous nations.‡ At the end of about a century from the preaching of the Apostles, there must have been, throughout the communities which they had formed, a general acquaintance with what they had taught, even had no written records of our religion been extant. In regard likewise to facts, important in their reference to Christianity, as, for example, the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, the Christians of the last half of the second century must have relied on the testimony of their predecessors. It is this traditionary knowledge concerning Christianity, not secret but open to all, which Irenæus and Tertullian appeal to with justifiable confidence, in their reasonings against the heretics, when they distinguish between the evidence from tradition and the evidence from Scripture. The tradition of which they speak is altogether different from the *secret* tradition of Clement. The origin of the opinion common to him and to the theosophic Gnostics may be explained by the supposition, that inferences true or false, from the truths taught by Christ and his Apostles, and theories built on those truths, were conceived of, and represented, as having been taught by them: and, since it did not

* Stromat. i. p. 323.

† Lib. iii. c. 3. § 1. p. 175.

‡ Ibid. c. 4. § 2. p. 178.

appear that they made a part of their public teaching, the notion, in consequence, grew up, that they were taught by them privately. This notion would ally itself with the conceptions of both Clement and the Gnostics concerning that higher esoteric wisdom, which few only were capable of receiving. In holding their common belief, it is probable that neither had a distinct conception of what was embraced in the tradition the existence of which they asserted. It appears from the whole tenor of the *Stromata* of Clement, that, in his view, the true knowledge, which, in union with accordant virtues, constituted an enlightened Christian (*his* Gnostic) in the highest sense of the words, comprehended the whole compass of intellectual philosophy, and particularly all that can be known by men respecting the nature, attributes, and operations of God.* If he had been asked, whether he be-

* Instead of producing at length the authorities and reasons for this statement, which would carry us too far away from our main purpose, I will quote a few sentences from the valuable work of the present Bishop of Lincoln (Dr. Kaye), entitled "Some Account of the Writings and opinions of Clement of Alexandria." It is the most important work on the subject of which it treats. The author says (pp. 238-241);

"By *γνώσις* [the higher esoteric knowledge] Clement understood the perfect knowledge of all that relates to God, his nature and dispensations."
 "The Gnostic [Clement's Gnostic] comprehends not only the First Cause and the Cause begotten by him [the Logos], and is fixed in his notions concerning them, possessing firm and immovable reasons; but also, having learned from the truth itself, he possesses the most accurate truth, from the foundation of the world to the end, concerning good and evil, and the whole creation, and, in a word, concerning all which the Lord spake." "With respect to the source from which this knowledge is derived, Clement says that 'it was imparted by Christ to Peter, James, John and Paul, and by them delivered down to their successors in the Church. It was not designed for the multitude, but communicated to those only who were capable of receiving it; orally, not by writing.' "

The notions of Clement respecting this secret tradition are not only to be distinguished from the reasonable conceptions of other fathers respecting that public traditionary knowledge concerning Christianity, which necessarily existed among Christians, but equally also from an opinion which began to prevail in the latter half of the fourth century, and which has become fundamental in the Roman Catholic Church. This opinion is, that certain doctrines and rites, which are not to be kept secret, but are to be made known to all, and to be believed or practised by all, are not expressly taught or enjoined in the New Testament, but are derived

lieved that all this knowledge had been handed down by a secret tradition, the question might have presented the subject to his mind under a new aspect, but he undoubtedly would have answered in the negative. Had he then been requested to point out what particular part of it he conceived to have been thus handed down, I think he would have been embarrassed by the inquiry.

In connection with their notion of a secret tradition, the Gnostics, or some of the Gnostics, said, according to Irenæus, "that the Apostles, practising dissimulation, accommodated their doctrine to the capacity of their hearers, and their answers to the previous conceptions of those who questioned them, talking blindly with the blind, weakly with the weak, and conformably to their error with those who were in error, and that thus they preached the Creator to those who thought that the Creator was the only God, but to those able to comprehend the unknown Father, they communicated this unspeakable mystery in parables and enigmas." * "Some," says Irenæus, "impudently contend that the Apostles, preaching among the Jews, could not announce any other God, but he in whom the Jews had believed." †

Again ; some of the Gnostics, especially the Marcionites, maintained, that Paul was far superior to the other Apostles in the knowledge of the truth,—“the hidden doctrine having been manifested to him by revelation.” ‡ They represented the other Apostles as having been entangled by Jewish prejudices, from which he was in a great measure free. Hence Tertullian, in one place, calls him “the Apostle of the Heretics.” § In support of this opinion, Marcion relied much on

from the oral teaching or the appointment of Christ or his Apostles, a knowledge of which has been preserved by tradition. This principle was, perhaps, first clearly avowed by Basil of Cæsarea, in the latter half of the fourth century, in his Treatise concerning the Holy Spirit.

* Lib. iii. cap. 5. § 1. p. 179.

† Ibid. cap. 12. § 6. p. 195.

‡ Ibid. c. 13. § 1. p. 200.

§ Advers. Marcion. Lib. iii. c. 5. p. 399.

that passage in the Epistle to the Galatians,* in which Paul represents himself as having reproved Peter and Barnabas for not acting conformably to the principles of Christianity, but by their conduct "compelling the Gentiles to Judaize," that is, to observe the Levitical Law.† Marcion regarded the Gospels as expressing the false Jewish opinions of their writers. But among the Gospels he conceived that there was ground for making a choice; and he selected, for his own use and that of his followers, the Gospel of Luke, the companion of Paul. This he further adapted to his purpose by rejecting from it what he viewed as conformed to those opinions. Nor did he consider Paul himself as wholly free from Jewish errors, but likewise struck out, from those of his Epistles which he used, the passages in which he thought them to be expressed. Sometimes, according to Irenæus, the Gnostics, apparently without making an exception in favor of St. Paul, charged the Apostles generally with Jewish errors and ignorance concerning the higher truths and mysteries of religion. "All those," he says, "who hold pernicious doctrines, have departed in their faith from Him who is God, and think that they have found out more than the Apostles, having discovered another God. They think that the Apostles preached the Gospel while yet under the influence of Jewish prejudices, but that their own faith is purer, and that they are wiser than the Apostles." He states that Marcion proceeded on these principles in rejecting the use of some of the books of Scripture, and of portions of those which he retained.‡ "The heretics," says Tertullian, "are accustomed to affirm, that the Apostles did not know all things: while at other times, under the influence of the same madness, they turn about, and maintain that the Apostles did, indeed, know all things, but did not teach all things to all."§ "I cannot help wondering," says

* Ch. ii. 11, seqq.

† Advers. Marcion. Lib. iv. c. 3. pp. 414, 415. Lib. i. c. 20. p. 375. Conf. De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 23. p. 210.

‡ Lib. iii. c. 12. § 12. p. 198.

§ De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 22. p. 209.

Clement of Alexandria, "how some dare to call themselves perfect, and Gnostics, thinking themselves superior to the Apostles."* But the theosophic Gnostics did not stop here. Irenæus, after saying, that the heretics, when confuted from the Scriptures, appealed to oral tradition, goes on thus; "But when we, on the other hand, appeal to that tradition, which, proceeding from the Apostles, has been preserved in the church by a succession of Elders, then they oppose tradition, saying, that they, being not only wiser than the Elders, but wiser than the Apostles, have discovered the pure truth. For the Apostles, they say, mixed their legal notion with the words of the Saviour; and not only the Apostles, but the Lord himself spoke sometimes from the Creator [as the Messiah of the Creator], sometimes from the Middle Space [that is, conformably to the spiritual nature which he had derived from Achamoth], and sometimes from the highest height [as the *Æon Christ* from the Pleroma];† but that they themselves know with full assurance the hidden mystery, unmixed, in all its purity."‡ The opinion of the Gnostics, here expressed, concerning the discourses of Christ is analogous to the Orthodox doctrine, still extant, that he spoke sometimes as a man, sometimes as God, and sometimes in his mediatorial character, as neither God nor man simply, but as both united; and that as a man he was ignorant of what, being God, he knew.

There is nothing to object to the general proposition of the

* *Pædagogus*, Lib. i. c. 6. pp. 128, 129.

† See before, pp. 267, 270.—According to the verbal construction of the old Latin Translation of Irenæus, which is here our authority, and which I have followed in my translation, though not in my exposition, these clauses apply equally to the Apostles as to Christ. But I cannot think that this meaning was *intended* by Irenæus, or, at least, that this was the meaning of the Gnostics. Irenæus elsewhere (Lib. i. c. 7. § 3. p. 34) gives a similar account of their opinions respecting the preaching of Christ, without mentioning the Apostles. Nor is there any probability that the Gnostics believed in the *inspiration* of men from the Pleroma, which opinion would be implied in the supposition, that the Apostles sometimes spoke "from the highest height."

‡ Lib. iii. c. 2. § 2. p. 175.

Gnostics, that the Apostles were under the influence of Jewish prejudices, nor to the proof which they brought of this fact from the conduct of Peter and Barnabas, which was reproved by Paul. Their extravagance consisted in the irrational misapplication which they made of this principle. The spirit of God, which enlightened the minds of the Apostles as to all essential truths of religion, did not deliver them from all error, and transform them into all-wise and all-knowing philosophers. But, if the Apostles were liable to any errors, they were particularly exposed to the influence of those in which they had been educated, and could hardly escape being more or less affected by the inveterate conceptions and errors of their countrymen. It being the object of the Gnostics to separate Judaism from Christianity, and to distinguish the God of the Jews from the God of Christians, they naturally seized upon this truth to effect their purpose; and as no strongly marked line can be drawn, defining the sphere within which alone the Apostles were liable to error, they applied, or rather misapplied, a principle correct in itself to all cases in which the words of the Apostles so explicitly contradicted their doctrine as to be incapable by any force of being conformed to it.

It remains to add a few words concerning the belief of the theosophic Gnostics in their own infallible spiritual knowledge. This they conceived of as the result of their spiritual nature. "They object to us," says Clement of Alexandria, "that we are of another nature, and unable to comprehend their peculiar doctrines."* A similar pretension to that of the Gnostics has been common among Christians. An essential doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church is its own infallibility, an infallibility which must reside in some of its individual members. Among the sects into which Protestants have been divided, the generality have, at least in the earlier stages of their growth, maintained the principle, ex-

* Stromat. vii. § 16. pp. 891, 892.

pressed in the perverted language of St. Paul, that *spiritual things are spiritually discerned*, and have, of course, confined this unerring spiritual discernment to themselves. Calvin taught, that "the first step in the school of the Lord is to renounce human reason.* For, as if a veil were interposed, it hinders us from attaining to the mysteries of God, which are not revealed but to little children;" † and, after these words, he proceeds to quote, as might be expected, the often-quoted passage of St. Paul, just referred to. Even the genuineness and inspiration of the books of the Bible, or, as he expresses it, the fact, that they "had proceeded from the very mouth of God" (*ab ipsissimo Dei ore fluxisse*), "were not to be submitted to reasoning and arguments," but were spiritually discerned; so as to be known with the same certainty, as men know that black is not white, and sweet is not bitter.‡ The theosophic Gnostics, in expressing their sense of the incapacity of common Christians to understand their doctrines, could not have used stronger language than that of Calvin concerning the natural blindness of the unregenerate to the truths of religion. It was, in his view, the spiritual illumination of the elect, which enabled them clearly to discern these truths; or, in other words, clearly to discern the identity of the system which he taught with the teachings of Christ.

The Gnostics, as we have seen, were equally able with Calvin to identify their systems with Christianity. In the modes by which they effected their purpose, we may observe the same operations of the human mind as have been going on from their day to our own. One of the most effectual means of checking their further progress is by directing attention to the extravagances to which they lead. It is a main advantage resulting from the study of obsolete errors, and one which this study alone can furnish, that, as we have no prejudices in their favor, we are able, without disturbance,

* "Humana perspicacia."

† Institut. Lib. iii. c. 2. § 34.

‡ Ibid. Lib. i. c. 7.

to trace them to their sources ; and when those sources are discovered, we may perceive that they are still in full action, producing new errors, or more commonly, perhaps, reproducing old ones under a new form. It may be doubted, whether a History of Human Folly would not be a more instructive work than our Histories of Philosophy ; but its contents would not be throughout so different from theirs, as its different title might lead one to expect.

Among the Gospels, the Marcionites used only their copy of that of Luke. To this they joined ten Epistles of St. Paul, from which, as from the Gospel, they rejected certain passages, as I have before mentioned. On this history of Christ, and on these Epistles, they founded their system, and from them they reasoned. They appealed to them as freely and confidently as did the catholic Christians, and the theosophic Gnostics, to the books of the New Testament in general. The arguments which they drew from them are presented to view in the writings of their opponents, especially of Tertullian. From those books they derived their knowledge of Christ and of Christianity. It does not appear, that they made a pretence to any exclusive spiritual discernment, or that they relied on any secret tradition. It does appear, that they made no use of any other history of Christ beside the Gospel of Luke. No apocryphal gospel is said to have been extant among them. They are never charged with having rested their system, wholly or in part, on any such gospel. But, had there been ground for the charge, it would undoubtedly have been made. The controversy between them and the catholic Christians would have brought out such a fact with the broadest distinctness. It would have been, to say the least, as much insisted upon as the fact, that they struck out some passages from the Gospel of Luke and the Epistles of Paul, notices of which are continually recurring in the writings of their opponents. Those passages the Marcionites rejected, and they disavowed the authority of the

other three Gospels, not on the ground that they were not genuine, but because, believing them to be genuine, they believed their authors to be under the influence of Jewish prejudices.

But were those which have been mentioned the only means that the Gnostics made use of to find support for their systems in the real or supposed teaching of Christ? Had they not, as has been imagined, gospels of their own, presenting a view of his ministry and instructions, different from that contained in the catholic Gospels;—accounts of Christ, which they preferred and opposed to those given by the Evangelists? Every one has heard of apocryphal and Gnostic gospels.

As regards the Marcionites, these questions have been answered. It is evident that they had no such gospels or gospel. Those theosophic Gnostics, who adopted the means that have been explained of reconciling their doctrines with Christianity, could, likewise, have had no such gospels. It has appeared, not only in the present Chapter, but throughout this work, that their systems, equally with the faith of the catholic Christians, were founded on the common account of Christ's ministry. In their reasonings they constantly referred to the Gospels. They therefore could have received as of authority no history of his ministry which varied essentially from those Gospels. Whether they had any other histories of his ministry, which did not vary essentially from the Gospels, is an unimportant question, so far as it regards the main purpose which we have in view. For, if those histories proceeded from authors who wrote from independent sources of information, they would serve, by their agreement, to confirm the accounts of the catholic Gospels; while, if they were merely founded on those Gospels, or on some one of them, they would serve to show the authority which the latter had very early attained.

But a question may be virtually settled without all the explanation having been given which is necessary to our

satisfaction, and to a full understanding of the subject. After all that has appeared, the inquiry may still recur, What, then, were those apocryphal and Gnostic gospels, about which so much has been said? To this inquiry I propose to give an answer in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE QUESTION, WHETHER THE GNOSTICS OPPOSED TO THE FOUR GOSPELS ANY OTHER WRITTEN HISTORIES OR HISTORY OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY.

THIS question will lead us to consider all those books, that have been called *apocryphal gospels*, which we have any reason for supposing to have been extant during the first two centuries, except the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel of Marcion. We have already seen the grounds for believing that the former, as it was first used by the Hebrew Christians, was the Hebrew Original of the Gospel of Matthew, though its text, in some or many copies, may have afterwards become much corrupted.* The latter was merely the Gospel of Luke mutilated by Marcion.† The authority of neither of these books, therefore, could be opposed to that of the catholic Gospels; nor can the epithet *apocryphal*, with its common associations, be properly applied to them. No book which was not in existence till after the end of the second century could have been used by the Gnostics as a basis for their opinions, or could, by any sect whatever, have been brought into competition with the four Gospels, as an original history of Christ's ministry. All that is necessary to be said in direct reply to the question proposed lies within a small compass. But the subject of apocryphal gospels, as well as that of apocryphal books in general, has been treated in such a manner as necessarily to produce confused and erroneous conceptions respecting them. It is a subject which demands explanation where argument is not needed; and the inquiry on which we are about to enter will, through its incidental

* See Vol. i. p. 196, seqq.

† See Additional Note, G.

relations, extend much beyond the second century, and embrace books which were not extant, at least in their present form, till long after that period.*

I begin by stating the most important considerations respecting the question proposed; and I hope to be excused for some repetition in hereafter recalling attention to them with reference to different writings.

Of the controversy carried on by the catholic Christians

* In respect to the apocryphal gospels, the modern writer whose information is principally relied on is Fabricius. In his "*Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*," he has given a full and accurate account of all the passages relating to them in the fathers of the first four or five centuries. I say, "a full and accurate account;" because his work has now sustained that reputation unquestioned for more than a century.—Fabricius, however, has merely brought together a mass of materials without applying them to the illustration of any fact whatever. He has not arranged the books which he treats of chronologically, with reference to the period when they are first mentioned, or when they may be supposed to have appeared. Such an arrangement would at once show, that far the greater number deserve no consideration from any supposable bearing on the authority of the Gospels. He has arranged them in the alphabetical order of their titles, which tends to produce the impression, that they all equally deserve attention.

Fabricius was followed by Jones in the first two volumes of his "*New and Full Method of settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*." But the principal value of Jones's work consists in its giving in an English dress the information to be found in Fabricius, and in the republication of some of the later apocryphal writings (also published by Fabricius) with English translations. He had no clear comprehension of his own purpose in writing; and his views and reasonings only tend to perplex the subject. He follows Fabricius in arranging the books in the alphabetical order of their titles.

In 1832, J. C. Thilo published the first volume of his "*Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*," a work commenced on an extensive plan, but of which no other portion has appeared. The first volume contains the later apocryphal writings, which had previously been published, with others in addition,—all apparently edited in a careful and thorough manner, with Prolegomena and notes. It contains also the Gospel of Luke used by Marcion, as restored by Hahn, who has made Marcion's Gospel a particular subject of study.

I shall refer to the three works which I have mentioned by the names of their respective authors. The copy of Fabricius which I use is of the second edition, printed in 1719, in three Parts. That of Jones is of the Oxford edition, printed in 1798.

with the Valentinians and the Marcionites, we have, as has been seen, abundant remains. The opinions and arguments of those heretics are brought forward in order to be confuted ; and, though we may not regard them as fully and fairly stated, yet, on the other hand, it cannot be supposed, that any striking peculiarity in their opinions, or any main topic of their reasoning, has been passed over in silence. If they had opposed other histories of Christ to the four Gospels, if they had relied for the support of their systems on accounts of his ministry different from those we now possess, we should find abundant notices of the fact. If they and the catholic Christians had been at issue on the question, which among discordant histories of Christ was to be received as authentic, this would necessarily have been the main point in controversy, the question to be settled before all others. We find in the case of the Marcionites, that their confining themselves to the use of a mutilated copy of Luke's Gospel is a circumstance continually presented to view ; and we have particular notices of the use which other heretics made of a few passages relating to Christ, not found in the Evangelists. The fathers were eager to urge against the Gnostics, the charges of corrupting and contemning the Scriptures, and of fabricating apocryphal writings. Had there been occasion to make it, they would not have passed over what in their view would have been a far graver allegation, that the Gnostics pretended to set up other histories of Christ in opposition to those received by the great body of Christians. Such a fact, from its very nature, neither would nor could have remained unnoticed. Abundant evidence of it must have come down to us ; and, if no evidence is to be found, we may conclude without hesitation, that the Gnostics made no pretence to having more authentic histories of Christ than the Gospels.

What then is the state of the case ? I answer, in the first place, that Irenæus and Tertullian were the two principal writers against the Gnostics, and from their works it does not appear that the Valentinians, the Marcionites, or any other

Gnostic sect, adduced in support of their opinions a single narrative relating to the public ministry of Christ beside what is found in the Gospels. It does not appear, that they ascribed to him a single sentence of any imaginable importance which the Evangelists have not transmitted. It does not appear, that any sect appealed to the authority of any history of his public ministry beside the Gospels, except so far as the Marcionites, in their use of an imperfect copy of St. Luke's Gospel, may be regarded as forming a verbal exception to this remark. The question, then, which we have proposed for consideration, would seem to be settled. The Gnostics did not oppose any other history of Christ to the catholic Gospels. Had they done so, it is altogether incredible, that the fact should not have been conspicuous throughout the controversial writings of Irenæus and Tertullian.

But what, then, were those ancient books which have been called "apocryphal gospels?" I answer, that, with the exception of the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of Marcion, and a narrative which Tatian formed out of the four Evangelists, it is not probable that any one of them was a professed history of Christ's ministry. The main evidence of this fact will appear from a particular examination of the accounts which have been given of them. But it may be here observed, that the name "gospel," signifying in its primary meaning "a joyful message," "glad news," was given as a title to the works of the Evangelists, because they contained an account of the joyful message which Christ gave from Heaven to men. It but indirectly denoted their character as histories of his ministry. The name "gospel" has ever been used to signify the whole scheme of Christianity; and a book, containing the views of its writer concerning this system, or the views ascribed by him to a particular Apostle, might hence be entitled his gospel, or denominated by him the gospel of that Apostle. There was a book in common use among the Manichæans, called a gospel, which, as Cyril of Jerusalem expressly mentions, contained no account of the actions of

Christ.* In later times, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, a book was published by Dr. Arthur Bury, which he entitled "The Naked Gospel." Another work appeared about the same time in Germany, which was called "The Eternal Gospel;" and another with the same title was produced in the thirteenth century.† It is not improbable likewise, that the fathers may have used the term "gospel" in the same way in which it has been used by controvertists in modern times, when they have charged their opponents with teaching "another gospel." There is a French book entitled "The New Gospel of Cardinal Pallavicini, revealed by him in his History of the Council of Trent;" ‡ Scioppius, in one of his letters, talks of "the fifth gospel of Luther;" § and the Jesuit René Rapin published against the Jansenists a work which he called "The Gospel of the Jansenists." || Thus in ancient times the charge of teaching a new gospel might occasion the title "gospel" to be given to some book by which it was not assumed; or even lead to the false supposition, that there was some book which bore that title, or to which it might be applied, when no such book existed. Among what have been called the Gnostic gospels, we find, as I have formerly mentioned, one under the name of "The Gospel of Eve," probably used by the Ophians, which professed to contain that wisdom which Eve learned from the Serpent. This gospel, therefore, was not a history of the ministry of Christ.¶ Nor can we reasonably suppose, that this character was ascribed to another, said to be in use among the Cainites, called "The Gospel of Judas," meaning Judas Iscariot.** Epiphanius mentions a book as in use among Gnostics, which he says

* It is ascribed by him to Scythianus as its author. *Catachesis*, vi. § 13. p. 92.

† Fabricius, i. 337*, 338.

‡ Fabricius, i. 339, note.

§ La Roche's *Memoirs of Literature*, vol. ii. p. 252.

|| Fabricius, i. 339, note.

¶ See before p. 130 seqq.

** Irenæus, *Lib. i. c. 31. § 1. p. 112.*

was named "The Gospel of Perfection." * Its title, and the brief account which he gives of it, imply that it was not an historical book, if indeed any such book existed. These remarks are merely preliminary. As we proceed, I trust it will appear that there is no ground for believing, that any work which may properly be called a Gnostic gospel was a professed history of Christ's ministry, or that any history of his ministry was in circulation during the second century, among either the catholic Christians or the Gnostics, beside the catholic Gospels, and books like those of Marcion and Tatian, founded upon one or all of them.

With this understanding of what might be meant by the title, "gospel," let us next inquire what we may find respecting Gnostic or apocryphal gospels in Irenæus and Tertullian.

Tertullian often mentions the mutilated copy of Luke's Gospel used by the Marcionites. But this, as I have said, should not be spoken of as an apocryphal gospel. He nowhere, throughout his writings, ascribes to the Gnostics the use of any proper Gnostic gospel, in any sense of the term "gospel." He nowhere speaks of any apocryphal gospel whatever, or intimates a knowledge of the existence of such a book. The conclusion is unavoidable. Either he did not know of the existence of any such book, or, if he did, he regarded it as too obscure and unimportant to deserve notice. But neither could have been the case in respect to any book which the Gnostics brought into competition with the Gospels.

Once, and once only, Irenæus speaks of what he calls a "gospel," as used by the Valentinians, in addition to the four Gospels. He thus expresses himself concerning it. "The followers of Valentinus, throwing aside all fear, and bringing forward their own compositions, boast that they have more gospels than there are. For they have proceeded

* Hæres. xxvi. § 2. p. 83.

to such boldness as to entitle a book not long since written by them, 'The True Gospel,' [*verbally*, "The Gospel of the Truth,"] a book which agrees in no respect with the Gospels of the Apostles, so that not even the Gospel can exist among them without blasphemy. For, if that which is brought forward by them be the true Gospel, but differ at the same time from those Gospels which have been handed down to us by the Apostles (those who wish may learn in what manner from the writings themselves), then it is evident that the Gospel handed down by the Apostles is not the true Gospel." *

The Author of the addition to Tertullian, probably copying Irenæus, says, "Valentinus likewise has his gospel beside ours." † By Valentinus is here, I presume, meant the Valentinians; sects being not unfrequently by the fathers thus designated from their leaders. These are the only notices to be found of the Valentinians, as a sect, having used any other book called a gospel, beside the canonical Gospels.

It is evident from the passage of Irenæus, as well as from much other equally unequivocal testimony, that the Valentinians received the four Gospels in common use. The charge against them is, that they had more gospels than the catholic Christians, that is, one more. This additional gospel, therefore, could have contained no history of Christ's ministry, at variance with that in the four gospels, which they also admitted. But (if such a gospel existed) there is no probability that it was an historical book of any sort. It was a gospel, we may reasonably presume, of the kind before described, containing an account of what its author believed to be the doctrines of the Gospel. If it had been a history presenting

* "Si enim quod ab iis profertur veritatis est Evangelium, dissimile est autem hoc illis [sc. Evangeliiis] quæ ab Apostolis nobis tradita sunt; (qui volunt possunt discere quemadmodum ex ipsis scripturis;) ostenditur jam non esse id quod ab Apostolis traditum est veritatis Evangelium." Lib. iii. c. 11. § 9. p. 192. This difficult passage may perhaps be thus arranged with a change of pointing, a parenthesis, and the printing of *scripturis* without an initial capital. But no difference of arrangement or translation is important as regards the present subject.

† De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 49. p. 222.

any additions to the narratives of the Evangelists, adopted by the Valentinians to support their opinions, they would have quoted it for this purpose; and of the additional accounts, and of the arguments founded upon them, we should have had abundant notices in the writings of their opponents, and in the fragments still extant of their own. But there are no such notices whatever.

Such is the state of the case, if the Valentinians really had among them a book with the title supposed. But, though the account of Irenæus, so far as it relates to the existence of the book, may be correct, there is reason for doubting it altogether. If he has fallen into a mistake, it is one that may easily be explained. The Valentinians, we may suppose, professed that they alone had "the true Gospel," meaning that they alone held the true doctrines of the Gospel; and some of their opponents misunderstood them as meaning, that they possessed a book with that title. Had they really, as Irenæus says, boasted of possessing such a gospel, it must have been an important book in reference to the exposition of their doctrines. But, as I have said, it is nowhere referred to by Irenæus himself, except in the passage just quoted. It is mentioned by no subsequent writer except the Author of the Addition to Tertullian, who probably took his notice of it from Irenæus. Tertullian himself, who was well acquainted with the works of Irenæus, affords proof, by his silence concerning it in his writings against the Valentinians, that he was not aware of its existence, or regarded it as not worth notice. It follows, therefore, either that Irenæus was in error in supposing that there was such a book, or that he was in error in supposing that the Valentinians, generally, attached any importance to it.

Irenæus gives one other title (before mentioned), purporting to be that of an apocryphal gospel which he supposed to be in existence, and to be called "The Gospel of Judas," that is, of Judas Iscariot. He represents it as having been used

by the Cainites. According to him, these heretics were distinguished by their abominable immorality, by their degrading the character of the Creator, and by their celebrating such personages in the Old Testament as Cain, Esau, Korah, and the Sodomites. They regarded them as allied to themselves by the possession of the same spiritual nature, and as having been, on account of this nature, persecuted by the Creator. They apparently considered Cain as the head of the spiritual among men. He was from "the higher power" (*a superiore principalitate*). The truth, on these subjects, they said, was known to Judas alone; and in consequence of this knowledge "he performed the mystery of delivering up his master; and thus through Judas all things earthly and heavenly [all the works of the Creator] were dissolved. And they produce," adds Irenæus, "a fabrication to this effect, calling it 'The Gospel of Judas.'"* The account of Irenæus is repeated by Epiphanius and Theodoret.

If there were such a book as Irenæus names, there is no ground for believing it to have been a fabricated history of Christ's ministry. But it is highly improbable that any sect or any book existed, such as Irenæus describes. It is a moral absurdity to suppose that there was a Christian sect which held such doctrines, and were guilty of such vices as he imputes to the Cainites;—that there were Christians avowing Cain to be their spiritual head, claiming alliance with the Sodomites, and taking Judas for their religious teacher. Nor would there be much less absurdity in imagining that any pseudo-Christian Gnostics exposed themselves in this barefaced manner to infamy and detestation; that they claimed to be on a level with the worst characters in the Old and New Testaments, and avowed doctrines at once so monstrous, and so intimately connected with Judaism and Christianity. Without supposing the existence of any such sect, it is not difficult to explain the origin of the stories concerning it in connection with the origin of the name. We have good rea-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 31. pp. 112, 113.

son to think, that the name "Nicolaitans" was derived from passages in the New Testament ;—and especially from two in the Apocalypse, in which it is applied to those who, having professed themselves Christians, indulged in licentiousness.* That of "Cainites," we may suppose, was derived from a passage (formerly quoted) in the Epistle of Jude, in which certain individuals are thus spoken of; "Woe for them! for they have walked in the way of Cain, and given themselves up to deceive, like Balaam, for pay, and brought destruction on themselves through rebellion, like Korah."† The name was applied to those otherwise called Nicolaitans, as we are informed by Tertullian in the only passage in which he mentions it.‡ But there was probably still another occasion of its use. The theosophic Gnostics considered Seth as the representative and head of the spiritual among men, and, in consequence, appear to have sometimes given themselves the name of Sethians.§ But the assumption of this name might naturally provoke the more angry among their opponents to apply the opposite name of Cainites to those Gnostics, at least, whom they regarded as guilty of gross vices. The name being given, a system of doctrines corresponding to it would be easily fabricated, out of exaggerations, misconceptions, and false reports; and one may find little difficulty in supposing, that the assertion, that those to whom it was applied were traitors to Christ, teaching not his gospel, but the gospel of Judas Iscariot, gave occasion to the notion that they had a book with that title. If there were no sect holding the doctrines imputed to the Cainites, there was no gospel in existence conformed to those doctrines. Should it however still be thought, that there may have been such a book, it is to be recollected that it must have been a book not used by

* See before, pp. 101, 102.

† Jude, ver. 11.—See before, p. 101.

‡ Tertullian, after referring to the Nicolaitans mentioned in the Apocalypse, says; "Sunt et nunc alii Nicolaitæ; Caiiana hæresis dicitur." *De Præscript. Heretic.* c. 33. p. 214.

§ See before, p. 18, note; pp. 138, 139.

Christians, of no authority, and, as appears from the little attention it received, of no notoriety.

Such is all the information concerning Gnostic or apocryphal gospels afforded by the two principal writers against the Gnostics. Tertullian, throughout his works, mentions no such gospel. Irenæus gives two titles supposed by him to belong to such books. But it is very improbable that there was any such book as "The Gospel of Judas." The existence of "The True Gospel," also, is doubtful. But if there were a book bearing that title, we cannot reasonably suppose it to have been a history of Christ's ministry at variance with the four Gospels.

The Valentinians and Marcionites were the two principal sects of the Gnostics, and probably comprehended far the greater part of their number. Excepting the story of Irenæus concerning "The True Gospel," there is no charge against either sect, that they appealed to apocryphal gospels; unless that name be given to Marcion's defective copy of Luke's Gospel. Next to those two sects the Basilidians appear, for some reason or other, to have been regarded as the most important; and we will now attend to what is said of their use of an apocryphal gospel.

Of any work called a "gospel," different from the four Gospels, which was in use among the Basilidians, there is no mention in Irenæus or in Clement of Alexandria, who are the principal sources of all the information concerning them, to which any credit can be attached. Nor is such a work mentioned by Epiphanius, who in general brought together all that he could find, true or false, to the prejudice of the heretics; nor by Eusebius, among the apocryphal writings which he enumerates; nor by Theodoret, who compiled his accounts of the heretics from many earlier authors. Such a book is first named by the Author of the Homilies on Luke,

which have been ascribed to Origen. That writer speaks of it in a passage in which he gives the titles, real or supposed, of various apocryphal gospels, to be hereafter noticed. He is commenting on the words with which Luke begins his Gospel, "Since many have undertaken to arrange a narrative of the events accomplished among us." He regards the term "undertaken" as perhaps implying a censure on the works referred to by Luke. The four evangelists, he says, did not "undertake;" they wrote under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. But others (since their day) had "undertaken," and among them, "Basilides," he says, "had the boldness to write a 'Gospel according to Basilides.'"* The whole passage, with this notice of a gospel ascribed to Basilides, was imitated by Ambrose† and Jerome‡ toward the end of the fourth century.

Such is the evidence that a Gospel was written by Basilides. It consists in the assertion of an unknown writer, who must have lived more than a century after the death of Basilides, and the repetition of this assertion by two other writers more than two centuries after that event. This evidence is of no weight to counterbalance the great improbability, that such a gospel should not have been taken notice of by the earlier opponents of Basilides, nor by any writer of a later age who has professed to give an account of his doctrines and sect. The fathers were very ready to charge the heretics with using books of no authority, apocryphal books. Why should we not have heard as much of a gospel written by Basilides, as of the defective Gospel of Luke used by the Marcionites?

The notion that Basilides wrote a gospel probably arose from the fact, that he wrote a commentary on the Gospels. In this he of course explained his views of Christianity; and these views, or the book in which they were contained, might

* Homil. i. in Lucam. Origen. Opp. iii. 938.

† Expositio Evang. Lucæ, Lib. i. Opp. i. 1265. Ed. Benedict.

‡ Comment. in Matth. Proem. Opp. Tom. iv. P. i. p. 2.

be called his gospel. Agrippa Castor, who, according to Eusebius, was a contemporary of Basilides, and whose "most able confutation" Eusebius says was extant in his time, apparently knew nothing of any "Gospel of Basilides," but did mention that he "wrote twenty-four books on the Gospels," meaning by that term the four Gospels.* From the twenty-third book of this Commentary Clement of Alexandria quotes several passages in connection.† The Commentary of Basilides is one among the decisive proofs of the respect in which the Gospels were held by the theosophic Gnostics.

If the account of the Author of the Homilies on Luke were founded on the existence of any work, this Commentary, in all probability, was the work, which, having heard of it and not having seen it, he called "The Gospel of Basilides." But were there another book, bearing that title, it could not have been a history of Christ's ministry at variance with our present Gospels. Of such a book we should have had far other information than an incidental mention of its title first made more than a century after the death of its author.

* Φησὶν [Ἀγρίππας] αὐτὸν εἶς μὲν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον τέσσαρα πρὸς τοῖς εἴκοσι συντάξαι βιβλία. Eusebii Hist. Eccles. Lib. iv. c. 7.—"It is uncertain," says Fabricius (i. 343*, note), "whether Basilides wrote these twenty-four volumes of Commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, or on some other of the four canonical Gospels, or on the whole Gospel-history, or on the Gospel according to the Egyptians, or, as Valesius suspects, on his own gospel." Similar doubts have been expressed by other learned men. They appear to have arisen, in part, from the erroneous prepossession, that the Gnostics commonly used apocryphal gospels, in preference to the catholic Gospels, and from inattention to a very common use of the word "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον) in ancient times, in a sense with which we are no longer familiar. The four Gospels, considered collectively, were called "the Gospel." Thus Origen says (Comment. in Joan. Opp. iv. 98), "The Gospel, though written by several, is one in effect." The title "Gospel," in the singular, was the appropriate title of a book containing the four Gospels. There is, in fact, no ground for doubt respecting the meaning of the words quoted. By τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, the article having no reference to any book before mentioned, and the term being used without any explanatory epithet, nothing can here be meant but the four Gospels, or, what amounts to the same thing, the Gospel-history as contained in the four Gospels.

† Stromat. iv. § 12. pp. 599, 600.

In what precedes we have seen the whole amount of information concerning apocryphal gospels, the use of which is attributed to either of the three principal Gnostic sects. This information consists of two stories, one concerning "The True Gospel," and the other concerning "The Gospel of Basilides." It is doubtful, as we have seen, whether any books existed bearing those titles; but did such books exist, they must have been works of no celebrity, not current among the Gnostics, and not regarded by them as of authority. No writer produces an example of their drawing an argument from either of them, or of their appealing to them for any purpose whatever.

We have seen, likewise, that of the two principal writers against the Gnostics, Tertullian makes no mention of apocryphal gospels, and we have considered what is the amount of evidence which Irenæus affords of their existence and use.

Next to Irenæus and Tertullian, their contemporary, Clement of Alexandria, is our most important authority concerning the Gnostics. He was a man of extensive information, a wide reader, quoting from a great variety of authors, and acquainted with the writings of the principal theosophic Gnostics, whose words he often cites. From him, therefore, if from any one, we should expect authentic notices of apocryphal gospels; and, accordingly, we do find mention of one such book, which, there is no doubt, really existed. It was called "The Gospel according to the Egyptians."

This book has, in modern times, been particularly remarked. It has been thought by many to have been a history of Christ's ministry, used by the Gnostics; and some have even imagined that it was one of those gospels referred to by Luke in the introduction to his own.* The facts concerning it are these.

Clement, in reasoning against those heretics who denied

* The opinions of modern authors respecting it are collected by Jones, i. 201, seqq.

the lawfulness of marriage, gives the following passage, as adduced by them in support of their doctrine. "When Salome asked the Lord, 'How long death should have power,' he replied, 'As long as you women bear children.'"^{*} This Clement asserts is only a declaration that death is the natural consequence of birth. Considering the passage, therefore, as having no force to prove the point for which it was adduced, namely, our Lord's disapproval of marriage, he does not remark upon the question of its authenticity, nor mention in this place from what book it was taken. But a few pages after he says, "But those who, through their specious continence, oppose themselves to the creation of God, cite what was uttered to Salome, of which I have before taken notice. The words are found, as I suppose, in the Gospel according to the Egyptians. For they affirm that our Saviour himself said, 'I have come to destroy the works of the female;'—by 'the female' meaning lust, by 'the works' generation and corruption."[†]

Clement explains the words ascribed to Jesus in a different sense from that in which they were understood by those against whom he wrote. It is unnecessary to give his remarks. Toward the conclusion of them he asks;

"But do not those, who prefer anything to walking by that Gospel rule which is according to the truth, also allege what follows of the conversation with Salome? For upon her saying, 'I have done well in not bearing children,' as if there were something improper in it, the Lord replied, 'Eat of every herb, but of that which is bitter eat not;' by which words he signifies, that celibacy or marriage is a matter within our own choice, neither being enforced by any prohibition of the other."[‡]

I proceed to the last passage which he quotes. He is here arguing particularly against a writer named Julius Cassian.

"Cassian [in defending his doctrine respecting celibacy] says, Upon Salome's asking when those things should be

^{*} Stromat. iii. § 6. p. 532. [†] Ibid. § 9. pp. 539, 540. [‡] Ibid. p. 541.

known concerning which she inquired, the Lord answered, 'When ye shall tread under foot the garment of your shame, and when the two become one, and the male with the female neither male nor female.' '*

By the garments of shame, that is, the garments of skin, which, according to the story in Genesis, God made for Adam and Eve, Cassian in common with other ancient allegorists understood human bodies, the flesh, the seat of corruption. The body was the garment of shame which he believed was to be trodden under foot.†

Part of the words ascribed to Christ in the passage last quoted, are likewise given as a "saying of the Lord," without reference to any book, in what has been called the "Second Epistle of Clement," of Rome, a spurious work, which I have formerly mentioned.‡

The words in the passage first quoted occur in the *Doctrina Orientalis*,|| as follows; "When the Saviour said to Salome, 'Death shall continue as long as women bear children,' he did not mean to blame the generation of children." The Gnostic writer, who here quotes the words, rejected, like Clement of Alexandria, the use made of them by the ascetics. He supposed them to have a mystical meaning, referring to Achamoth.

The title of "The Gospel according to the Egyptians" is mentioned by the Author of the Homilies on Luke in the passage before referred to, and after him by three writers who have imitated that passage, namely, Jerome, Titus Bostrensis, and Theophylact.§

Epiphanius, in his article on the Sabellians, after saying, that they make use of all the writings both of the Old and of

* Stromat. iii. § 13. p. 553.

† See the context of the passage in Clement, p. 554, and Beausobre, *Histoire du Manichéisme*, Tome ii. pp. 135, 136.

‡ See Vol. i. p. 338. The words are found at the end of the fragment of this Epistle which remains.

|| § 67, p. 985.

§ Fabricius, i. 335*, note.

the New Testament, selecting passages to their purpose, adds, "But their whole error, and the main support of their error, they derive from certain apocryphal books, particularly that called 'The Egyptian Gospel,' a name which some have given it. For in that there are many things to their purpose, of an obscure, mystical character, which are ascribed to the Saviour; as if he himself had made known to his disciples, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, were the same person."*

An improbable story, resting solely on the testimony of Epiphanius, is not entitled to credit; and this story about the Sabellians is altogether improbable. Epiphanius does not seem to have known even the proper title of the book which he charges them with using. He says that it was called "The Egyptian Gospel;" the other writers who mention it give it the title of "The Gospel according to the Egyptians."

I have quoted all the fragments, and, I believe, mentioned all the notices, of this apocryphal gospel, which have come down to us. One unaccustomed to such studies might be surprised to see the hypotheses and assertions that have been founded upon them in modern times. What in fact appears is, that it was an anonymous book, extant in the second century, and probably written in Egypt, in the dark and mystical style that prevailed in that country. In judging of its notoriety and importance we must compare the few writers who recognise its existence with the far greater number to whom it was unknown, or who were not led by any circumstance to mention it. It was a book of which we should have been ignorant, but for a few incidental notices afforded by writers, none of whom give evidence of having seen it.†

* Hæres. lxii. § 2. Opp. i. 513, 514.

† That it had not been seen by Clement of Alexandria, from whom our principal information concerning it is derived, appears from his turns of expression in remarking on the quotations from it;—"The words are found, *as I suppose* (*οἶμαι*),

Neither Clement, nor any other writer, speaks of it as a Gnostic gospel. It does not appear that it had any particular credit or currency among the generality of the Gnostics. Some ascetics of their number, in maintaining the obligation of celibacy, argued from a passage found in it, as they did undoubtedly from passages found in the four Gospels; but other Gnostics, as we have seen from the *Doctrina Orientalis*, rejected their interpretation. The Gnostics did not appeal to it in support of their more distinguishing and fundamental doctrines; for had they done so, we should have been fully informed of the fact.

As this is the first apocryphal gospel, the former existence of which we have clearly ascertained, the question arises, whether it were or were not a history of Christ's ministry. The only argument of any weight for believing it to have been so is, that it contained a narrative of a pretended conversation of Christ with Salome. But if it were not an historical, but a doctrinal book, there is no difficulty in supposing that the writer might find occasion to insert in it a traditional account of a discourse of Christ. A few such traditional accounts of sayings of our Lord (probably most, if not all of them, spurious) are found in other writers of the first three centuries.* As regards the words ascribed to him in the conversation with Salome, it is evident that the tradition concerning them was false. Our Saviour never expressed himself as he is reported to have done in the passages that have been quoted. The writer had an erroneous conception of his character. But if the book had been an historical gospel, this conception would have pervaded it, and would have been prominent in many other particular passages. A history of Christ's ministry, so foreign in its character from the Gospels as this must have

in the Gospel according to the Egyptians;"—" *They affirm*, that the Saviour himself said;"—and where, in appealing to a passage in the conversation with Salome, as justifying his own views, he refers to it as quoted by those whom he is opposing, and not as otherwise known to him, thus, "Do they not also allege what follows?" See Jones, i. 206.

* Fabricius, i. 321*, seqq. Jones, i. 405, seqq.

been, could not have existed in the last half of the second century,—whether it were a composition of an early age, or a fiction of later times,—without having been an object of far greater attention than what this book received. Especially, had it been brought forward by any sect in opposition to the Gospels, it would have been a primary subject of discussion. But we have seen that the book in question was little regarded or known. It could not, therefore, have been a history of Christ's ministry.

This is the only apocryphal gospel, unless the Gospel according to the Hebrews be regarded as apocryphal, the title of which is mentioned by Clement. According to his present text he quotes one other without giving its title. But there are good reasons for believing that his text, as it stands, is corrupt, and that there was originally no mention in it of a gospel.*

* Clement (Stromat. v. § 10. p. 684) is treating of the hidden wisdom on which he so much insists. He professes to quote a passage from a prophet, apparently intending Isaiah, though nothing very like it is found in his writings, or elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is this; "Who shall understand the parable of the Lord [Jehovah], but the wise and understanding and he who loves his Lord?" Clement then, as his text now stands, goes on thus; "For it is in the power of few to understand these things. For the Lord, though not unwilling to communicate, the prophet says [or, the Scripture says], declared *in a certain gospel*, 'My secret is for me and the sons of my house.'"—"Οὐ γὰρ φθονῶν, φησί, παρήγγειλεν ὁ Κύριος ἐν τινὶ εὐαγγελίῳ," κ. τ. λ. I suppose the words "in a certain gospel" to be an interpolation. The passage quoted corresponds to what is found in some copies of the Septuagint at Isaiah xxiv. 16. (See the note on the passage in Potter's edition of Clement, where in the first line "cap. 2," is a misprint for "cap. 24.") The verb φησί, *says*, must have for its subject either the prophet mentioned immediately before, or the Scripture (the ellipsis supposed in the last case being not uncommon). But Clement cannot be imagined to have made so incongruous an assertion, as that "The prophet says,"—or, "The Scripture says,"—"that the Lord [Christ] declared in a certain gospel." That he considered himself as borrowing the words, "My secret is for me and my children," not from a certain gospel, but from Isaiah, appears also from the circumstance, that a few lines after them, he gives a quotation from Isaiah, introducing it with the words, "The prophet says again" (Πάλιν ὁ προφήτης).—I suppose, therefore, that the words "in a certain gospel" were originally a marginal gloss made by a transcriber, who attributed to Christ the declaration quoted by Clement, and who, knowing that it was not found in the four Gospels, thought it must be in some gospel or other—See Jones, i. 442, seqq.

If this be so, then, with the exception just mentioned of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, supposing that this exception should be made, the Gospel according to the Egyptians is the only apocryphal book, bearing the title of a gospel, that is mentioned by any writer during the three centuries succeeding our Lord's death, from which a single quotation is professedly given, or of which it is probable that a single fragment remains.

As I have said, the title of no other apocryphal gospel, used by any Gentile Christians, is mentioned by Clement. But it is desirable to give the fullest information on the subject which we are examining; for, as I have before remarked, it is a subject that requires elucidation rather than argument. I will therefore advert to another work, which he quotes under the name of "The Traditions," and which has been imagined to be the same with an apocryphal gospel called "The Gospel according to Matthias." He speaks of the Traditions in the following passages:

"To attain wisdom we must begin with wondering at things, as Plato says in his Theatetus; and Matthias, in the Traditions, thus concludes; 'Wonder at present things;' making this the first step of our progress in knowledge."*

In arguing against the licentiousness of the Carpocratians, he adduces another passage, thus:

"It is said † likewise, that Matthias also thus taught;

* Stromat. ii. § 9. pp. 452, 453.

† Λέγουσι γάρ, that is, "They say," "It is said." Different writers who have spoken of "The Traditions," (as Fabricius, ii. 785, Grabe, Spicilegium, ii. 118, Jones, i. 255, and Lardner, Works, i. 410, note f.) have fallen into the error of supposing the Carpocratians or Nicolaïtans, against whom Clement is writing, to be the subject of the verb, and consequently of making Clement represent them as quoting a passage directly opposed to the principles he ascribed to them. He himself quotes the passage against them. The next quotation given above from the Traditions is introduced by him in like manner with Λέγουσι δέ.—The error has partly arisen from the fact, that some dissolute sectaries did, as Clement mentions, pervert the ascetic maxim, "Abuse the body," perhaps quoting it ironically. See before, p. 79. p. 102.

‘ We must contend against the flesh and humble it, granting it no intemperate pleasure, but promote the growth of the soul through faith and knowledge.’ ”*

He again quotes a passage ascribed to Matthias, for the purpose, as before, of confirming his own doctrine: “ It is said in the Traditions, that Matthias, the Apostle, often repeated, ‘ that if the neighbour of one of the elect sin, he himself has sinned ; for if he had conducted himself as Reason (the Logos) dictates, his neighbour would have so revered his course of life as not to sin.’ ”† The language is too unlimited, but the morality is good.

In what is supposed to be a Latin translation of a portion of a lost work of Clement, called “ Hypotyposes ” or Institutions, there is another strange passage quoted from the Traditions, as agreeing with the conceptions of the writer. Clement, if he be the writer, is commenting on the first words of the first Epistle of John, which,—to render as he understood them,—are these ; “ What was from the beginning, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have heard, and our hands have touched concerning the Logos of life.” He maintains (conformably to what Photius says ‡ was a heresy affirmed by Clement in the work just mentioned), that the Logos who was from the beginning is to be distinguished from the Logos who became incarnate. The latter consisted of those powers of the former which proceeded from him as “ a ray from the sun ; ” and “ this ray, coming in the flesh, became an object of touch to the disciples.” “ Thus,” he says, “ it is related in the Traditions, that ‘ John, touching his external body, plunged his hand in, the hardness of the flesh offering no resistance to it, but giving way to the hand of the disciple.’ ” Hence it is that John affirms, ‘ Our hands have touched concerning the Logos of life ; ’ § that which came in the flesh being made an

* Stromat. iii. § 4. p. 523.

† Ibid. vii. § 13. p. 882.

‡ Photii Bibliotheca, col. 285. Ed. Schotti.

§ “ Propter quod et infert, *Et manus nostræ contrectaverunt de verbo vitæ.* ”

object of touch." *—As I have formerly remarked, † such traditions strikingly illustrate what would have been the state of the history of Jesus in the latter half of the second century, had it not been for the early existence and authoritative character of the Gospels.

There is no reason to suppose that the book called "The Traditions" was in favor with any Gnostics. Clement does not represent it as having been cited by any heretical writer. On the contrary, he himself quotes it as confirming his own opinions. He does not entitle it "The Traditions of Matthias," as it has been called in modern times, but simply "The Traditions." The former title has been given it, because, in the three passages quoted by Clement in his *Stromata*, the name of Matthias occurs; and this title having been given it, the book has been fancied by some to be the same with an apocryphal gospel, called "The Gospel according to Matthias."

Of this book nothing but the title remains. It is first mentioned by the Author of the *Homilies on Luke*, after him by his imitators, Ambrose and Jerome, and also by Eusebius. Possibly the notion that there was such a book may have arisen from the fact mentioned by Clement, ‡ that the Gnostics boasted that their opinions were favored by Matthias, or, in other words, that they taught the Gospel as it was understood by Matthias, the Gospel according to Matthias. Had they possessed a book with that title known to Clement, it seems likely that he would have spoken of it, when thus taking notice of their claim to the countenance of Matthias. Considering the tendency of the fathers to charge the heretics with using books of no authority, the bare titles of supposed apocryphal and heretical works given by the Author of the *Homilies on Luke*, and by writers after the end of the third century, deserve little consideration.

* Apud Clementis Fragmenta. Opp. p. 1009.

† See before, pp. 275, 276.

‡ See before, p. 288.

Before the time of Origen, no other writer besides Irenæus and Clement mentions any apocryphal gospel, real or supposed, except Serapion, as quoted by Eusebius. Serapion, who was Bishop of Antioch about the close of the second century, wrote, concerning a gospel called "The Gospel according to Peter," a tract of which Eusebius gives the following account.*

"Another tract was composed by Serapion concerning the Gospel according to Peter, so called, the object of which was to confute the errors contained in it, on account of some in the church at Rhossus, who had been led by this book to adopt heterodox opinions. From this it may be worth while to quote a few words in which he expresses his opinion concerning it. 'We brethren,' he writes, 'acknowledge the authority both of Peter and the other Apostles as we do that of Christ; but we reject, with good reason, the writings which falsely bear their names, well knowing that such have not been handed down to us. I indeed, when I was with you, supposed that you were all going on in a right faith, and, not reading through the gospel under the name of Peter which was produced by them [those who were pleased with it], I said, If this is all that troubles you, let the book be read. But having since learnt from what has been told me, that their minds had fallen into some heresy, I hasten to be with you again, brethren, so that you may expect me shortly. Now we, brethren, know that a like heresy was held by Marcion, who also contradicted himself, not comprehending what he said, as you may learn from what has been written to you. †

* Hist. Eccles. Lib. vi. c. 12.

† As this sentence is unimportant, and as I believe the present text to be corrupt, I have ventured to render it as perhaps it should be amended. It now stands thus:—*Ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀδελφοί, καταλαβόμενοι ὁμοίαν τὴν αἵρέσεως ὁ Μαρκιανὸς, καὶ ἐαυτῷ ἠναντιοῦτο, μὴ νοῶν ὅτι ἐλάλει, ὃ μαθήσεσθε ἐξ ὧν ὑμῖν ἐγράφη. Ἐδυνήθημεν γὰρ παρ' ἄλλων, κ. τ. λ.* I would read the first words as follows:—*Ἡμεῖς δὲ, ἀδελφοί, κατελάβομεν ὅτι ὁμοίαν τὴν αἵρέσεως ὁ Μαρκίαν, ὃς καὶ ἐαυτῷ ἠναντιοῦτο, κ. τ. λ.*

There is also some uncertainty about the precise meaning of the next sentence;

For we have been able to procure this gospel from others who use it, that is, from his followers, who are called *Docetæ* (for the greater part of the opinions in question belong to their system), and having gone through it, we have found it for the most part conformable to the true doctrine of the Saviour ; but there are some things exceptionable,* which we subjoin for your information.' ”

We may conclude, from this account, that the Gospel of Peter was not a history of Christ's ministry. Serapion would not have regarded with such indifference as he first manifested a history of our Lord, ascribed to the Apostle Peter, which he had not before seen. Were it genuine, it must have been to him, as to any one else, an object of great interest. But the supposition of its genuineness is too extravagant to require discussion.—Nor can we suppose it to have been an original history (that is to say, not a compilation from any one or more of the four Gospels), which, though not the work of Peter, was yet entitled to credit. For it is impossible that the existence of such a history should not have been notorious ; that it should not have been a frequent subject of remark ; that it should have been unknown to Serapion, himself a bishop and a controversial writer ; or, even if previously unknown, that it should not at once have excited his attention.—Nor can it have been a history founded upon one or more of the four Gospels, with certain additions favoring the opinions of the *Docetæ*. When we recollect the abundant notices of Marcion's gospel, which was only a mutilated copy of Luke's, it cannot be believed that there was another historical book extant among Marcion's followers of a similar character (except that it contained some obnoxious additions), of which the notices are so scanty, and which is never mentioned as an *historical* book.—There is still another supposition ; that it was a history undeserving of credit, a history

but, fortunately, this uncertainty does not extend to any thing important in the paragraph.

* τὰ μὲν πλείονα τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου τοῦ Χωτῆρος, τινὰ δὲ προσδισταλμένα.

containing many fabulous accounts. But this is inconsistent with the manner in which Serapion mentions it; for he speaks of it with but slight censure, commending the generality of its contents; as no catholic writer of his time would have spoken of such a professed history of Christ's ministry as we have last imagined.

The Gospel according to Peter, then, was not an *historical* book; and this appears not merely from what has been said, but from the fact, that neither Serapion nor Eusebius gives any intimation that it bore that character. Serapion's treatise was in the hands of Eusebius, as it probably had been in those of many before him. It treated of the errors in the book, it was written to refute them; and, had these errors consisted in false narratives concerning Christ, there is no reasonable doubt that plenary evidence of the fact would have existed, both in the writings of Serapion and Eusebius, and in those of other fathers. It appears that it was used by the Gnostics, and had it been a professed history of Christ's ministry used by them, we should certainly have had much more full information concerning it. The supposition, that it was not an historical book, and this alone, it may be further observed, agrees with the manner in which Serapion describes it, as "for the most part conformable to the true doctrine" (not the true history) "of the Saviour, but containing some things exceptionable."

The book, it may be added, was not of any importance or notoriety. Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, in his time the principal see in the East, was, as we have seen, unacquainted with it, till his attention was called to it by some Christians of his diocese, as favoring heretical doctrines. We may conclude, therefore, that it was unknown to a great majority of Christians, his contemporaries. Beside the notice of it by him, we find a passage in Origen. It is also referred to by Eusebius and Jerome, who mention it as an apocryphal work falsely ascribed to Peter. Eusebius especially enumerates it among those books which were brought forward by the heretics

under the names of Apostles; such as no writer of the Church had thought worth commemorating, they being altogether devoid of good sense and piety. No fragment of it remains, and these are all the notices of it found in the first four centuries.

We come then to Origen. It is doubtful whether the Homilies on Luke, which have been so often mentioned in this Chapter, are to be referred to him as their author.* If they are not, there is but one passage in all Origen's works, in which he speaks of an apocryphal gospel as used by any Gentile Christians, catholic or heretical. It is to this effect; "Some say that the brothers of Jesus were the sons of Joseph by a wife to whom he was married before his marriage with Mary, relying on the tradition in the Gospel according to Peter or in the book of James."† The Gospel according to Peter has just been referred to; of the book of James I shall speak hereafter.

I have remarked on three titles of apocryphal gospels mentioned by the Author of the Homilies on Luke. There is one other, "The Gospel according to Thomas," to which likewise I shall advert hereafter.

Beside those writers whom I have quoted, there is none who speaks of apocryphal gospels before Eusebius, in the first half of the fourth century. He enumerates among heretical books, "altogether absurd and irreligious," three of those already mentioned, namely, the gospels of Peter, Thomas, and Matthias,‡ but gives no further information concerning them, and adds no new title to the list.

I have brought down the inquiry respecting apocryphal gospels to a much later period than was necessary. No one

* See the Preface to the third volume of De la Rue's edition of Origen.

† Comment. in Matth. Tom x. Opp. iii. 462, 463.

‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. iii. c. 25.

will suppose that a book of which there is no mention before the fourth century could have served the Gnostics as a basis for their doctrines. If any book appeared after the commencement of the fourth century, pretending to be an original history of Christ's ministry,—of which we have no proof, and which, in the nature of things, is altogether improbable,—no one will imagine that it was entitled to regard. Of any book of an early age, purporting to give an account of his ministry different from that contained in the four Gospels, it is a moral impossibility, that we should not have received full and unequivocal information from writers before the time of Eusebius.

There is no reason, as I conceive, to suppose that the apocryphal gospels which have been mentioned, or the other apocryphal books extant during the first three centuries, were commonly written with the fraudulent design of furnishing the pretended authority of Jesus or his Apostles in support of false doctrines or spurious history; or that when they bore the name of an Apostle, it was intended that they should be ascribed to him as his proper work. The author of such a book may have put his own opinions into the mouth of an Apostle by a common rhetorical artifice, as Plato in his dialogues introduces Socrates and Timæus as teaching his doctrines; or as if one, at the present day, were to publish a work calling it "The Gospel as taught by (*according to*) St. Paul," or "The Gospel as taught by St. James." Of this mode of writing we have a remarkable example in the Clementine Homilies, the author of which could have intended no deception. But the whole account given in them of the actions of Peter is a fiction, and the discourses ascribed to him contain only the writer's own views of the character of Christianity. According, however, to the ancient use of language, this book might have been, and possibly was, called "The Gospel according to Peter." Such books might be, or it might be fancied that they were, founded on some traditional information respecting the teaching of an Apostle.

Thus a book called "The Preaching of Peter," or "The Preaching of Peter and Paul," was regarded both by Clement of Alexandria and by Lactantius as a work of some authority. Lactantius supposed it to be a record of their preaching while together at Rome.* Clement quotes it in the same manner as he quotes The Traditions before mentioned, and the works of the Pagan philosophers, not in evidence of facts, but as corresponding with and confirming his own opinions.

Irenæus speaks, as we have seen, of a gospel by Judas Iscariot. There was reported to be another under the name of Matthias, and another under the name of Thomas; but these titles are not mentioned before the third century. Of the books or of the titles which have been enumerated, bearing the names of Apostles, there remains only the Gospel of Peter, which became known to Serapion about the close of the second century. But it is altogether incredible, that any Gentile Christian in the second century should have engaged in so hopeless and foolish an attempt, as to endeavour to pass off a composition of his own as a gospel written by an Apostle,—a gospel which had never before been heard of. Nor is it much more likely, that any Gentile Christian, without ascribing his work to an Apostle, would, after the destruction of Jerusalem, have pretended to give an original history of Christ's ministry at variance with the four Gospels. As we have already seen, there is no evidence that any such work existed.

The subject of the apocryphal gospels has, as it was natural it should, attracted much attention. It is a subject which deserved to be thoroughly examined. But the unavoidable consequence of the manner in which it has been treated has been to produce a very false impression of their importance. They were obscure writings, very little regarded or known by any Christians, catholic or heretical. We find in Justin

* Institut. Lib. iv. c. 21.

Martyr and Tertullian nothing concerning them ; in Irenæus, two titles, one purporting to be that of a book, which most probably was not extant, and the other, likewise perhaps originating in mistake, but supposed to belong to a Valentinian gospel, which there is no evidence that the Valentinians ever appealed to. Clement gives some extracts from a gospel, which he found quoted by the Encratites or ascetics. Serapion mentions the Gospel of Peter, as in the hands of some persons belonging to a parish in his diocese, called Rhossus. Origen once refers to the same book. And the author of the Homilies on Luke adds three other titles of books of which he gives no account.* These are all the notices of apocryphal gospels to be found in all the writers of Christian antiquity before the end of the third century. Had they been works of any notoriety, works possessing any intrinsic or accidental importance, we should have had page after page of controversy, discussion, and explanation concerning them.

About the beginning of the last century a manuscript was made known of a gospel ascribed to Barnabas, in the Italian language, but supposed to be translated from the Arabic. It is the work of a Mahometan, or a work interpolated by a Mahometan. Much more has been written by different

* I have not adverted in the text to one title mentioned by the Author of the Homilies, namely, "The Gospel according to the Twelve Apostles;" because, as we learn from Jerome (*Advers. Pelagianos*, Lib. iii. Opp. T. iv. P. ii. col. 533), this was only a name which was sometimes given to the Gospel of the Hebrews. It may naturally have had its origin in the circumstance, that the Hebrew Christians affirmed, that the Gospel of Matthew, which alone they used, contained the Gospel as taught by the Apostles, or, in other words, was the Gospel according to the Apostles. But there is something more to be observed. The title given is not simply "The Gospel according to the Apostles," but "The Gospel according to the *twelve* Apostles." The Hebrew Christians, generally, did not recognise the Apostleship of St. Paul, but regarded him as a false teacher. They revolted at his doctrine of the abolition of their Law and of their peculiar national distinctions. Hence they may have called their Gospel the Gospel according to the *twelve* Apostles, of whose number he was not, in order to imply, that it was from the twelve Apostles, and not from him, the preacher to the Gentiles, that the true doctrines of the Gospel were to be learned.

authors about this book,* than all that is to be found in the Christian writers of the first three centuries concerning apocryphal gospels. Yet it is a book of which, probably, few of my readers have ever heard; and of which he who has known any thing may have forgotten what he knew. It is easy to apply this fact to assist ourselves in judging of the importance to be attached to the notices of apocryphal gospels found in the fathers.

It may seem as if, in reference to our present inquiry, any further discussion of the subject must be useless; and it would be so, but for the misapprehensions which have existed concerning it. There are some fabulous books still extant, which, thus standing as it were in the foreground, are more likely, at first view, to be taken for true representatives of ancient apocryphal gospels, than those titles and fragments, appearing in the remote distance, with which alone we are in fact concerned. These books, though, in their titles, they do not bear the name of gospels, have, in modern times, been called "*Gospels of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*," and "*Gospels of the Infancy*," that is, of the infancy of Jesus. They have, likewise, directly or indirectly, been brought into competition with the four Gospels. But whatever tends to weaken the exclusive authority of the catholic Gospels, or to confound them in the same class with fabulous writings, opens the way for a vague conjecture, that there may have been in early times other histories of the ministry of Christ at variance with those Gospels, and entitled to as much or more credit. We will, therefore, go on to take notice of the works referred to.

In the quotation that I have given from Origen,† beside the

* See Fabricius, iii. 373, seqq., Jones, i. 162, seqq., Sale's Translation of the Koran (Ed. 1825), in his Preliminary Discourse, p. 102, and in his Notes, Vol. i. p. 61, p. 170; and the works referred to by the authors mentioned.

† See before, p. 324.

mention of the Gospel of Peter, there is mention, likewise, of a book of James. About the middle of the sixteenth century the celebrated visionary Postel brought to the notice of European scholars a work written in Greek, a manuscript of which he found in the East. It is a book of about a quarter of the size of the Gospel of Mark. He entitled it "The Protevangelion (that is, the First-Gospel) of St. James the Less;"*—the pretended events which it relates being supposed by him to have occurred prior to those recorded by St. Mark, to whose Gospel he fancied it intended for an introduction. But a number of manuscripts of it are now known, and the title Protevangelion is not supported by their authority. The author in the conclusion of the work gives his name as James. It is a collection of legendary fables, principally concerning the nativity of the Virgin Mary, her history and that of Joseph, and the nativity of Jesus. The nativity of the Virgin is represented to have been miraculous, like that of Samuel, and to have been announced by an angel. Some things are interwoven from the first two chapters ascribed to Matthew, and from the account of our Saviour's birth given by Luke. There are two coincidences of its narrative with what is found in ancient authors, which deserve notice. The first relates to the passage of Origen just referred to.

Origen says, that, conformably to the book of James, the individuals called in the Gospels the brothers† of Jesus were children of Joseph by a former wife. In the Protevangelion, Mary is represented as having been dedicated by her parents as a virgin to the service of God in the Temple, but at the age of twelve years as having been removed thence by the priests, and committed in trust to Joseph with the purpose of her becoming his wife. Before receiving her he is represented as saying, "I am an old man and have children."‡ The story,

* The work has been republished by Fabricius, Jones, and Thilo.

† The word in the original, ἀδελφοί, should be rendered *kinsmen*, according to a common use of it. It does not in the passage in question denote brothers in the limited sense of the English word.

‡ Protevangelion, c. 9.

that Joseph, when he married Mary, was an old man with children by a former wife, is found in many writers after the middle of the fourth century.

One of the fables in this book is, that Mary after childbirth remained in all respects as a virgin.* The story is referred to and countenanced by Clement of Alexandria.† Tertullian, on the contrary, in contending against those Gnostics who asserted that the body of Christ was not a body of flesh and blood, and that it was in no part derived from his mother, insists on his proper birth, and incidentally represents it as in all respects like that of others.‡ It is not, however, to be inferred that the Gnostics maintained the opinion just mentioned, for, on the one hand, the Marcionites denied altogether the nativity of Christ; and, on the other, that opinion was not necessarily connected with the doctrine of the theosophic Gnostics, who ascribed to Christ a body, though not a human body. But, with a strange approximation to the Gnostic denial of the proper body of Christ, it has become the established faith of the Roman Catholic church.§ It was made an article of orthodox belief by the Lateran Council, held under Pope Martin the First in the year 649.

Unless Origen, under the title of the book of James, refers to some work like the Protevangelion, that is, to some pre-

* Protevangelion, cc. 19, 20.

† 'Αλλ', ὥς ἔοικεν, τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ μέχρι νῦν δοκεῖ ἡ Μαριάμ λεχῶ εἶνα διὰ τὴν τοῦ παιδίου γέννησιν, οὐκ οὔσα λεχῶ· καὶ γὰρ μετὰ τὸ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν μαιωθεῖσαν φασί τινες παρθένον εὐρεθῆναι. Stromat. vii. § 16. pp. 889, 890.

‡ In his tract De Carne Christi.

§ "Il convient toutefois qu'il est de la foi catholique, que Marie est demeurée Vierge après l'enfantement comme devant." Fleury, Hist. Ecclés. An. 847.— In the Catechism of the Council of Trent (P. i. Art. 3. n. 18) it is said; "Præterea, quo nihil admirabilius dici omnino, aut cogitari potest, nascitur [Christus] ex matre sine ullâ maternæ virginitatis diminutione, et quo modo postea ex sepulcro clauso et obsignato egressus est, atque ad discipulos clausis januis introivit; vel, ne a rebus etiam, quæ a naturâ quotidie fieri videmus, discedatur, quo modo solis radii concretam vitri substantiam penetrant, neque frangunt tamen, aut aliquâ ex parte lædunt; simili, inquam, et altiori modo Jesus Christus ex materno alvo, sine ullo maternæ virginitatis detrimento, editus est, ipsius enim incorruptam virginitatem verissimis laudibus celebramus."

tended history of the mother of our Lord, which may have served for the foundation of that now extant, there is no mention of any such book before the latter half of the fourth century. In the fourth and fifth centuries, it seems probable that there was more than one narrative of this kind in existence; but that these narratives were generally regarded as fabulous and worthless.* During the ages of darkness that followed, the legends concerning the Virgin found favor, in common with other fables, which overspread ecclesiastical and profane history. Many of those legends have entered into the established mythology of the Roman catholic Church, and have furnished conceptions for its great masters in the art of painting. But the particular book we are considering, the Protevangelion, never obtained such credit in the West as in the East. In the West, its existence had become unknown before it was brought to light by Postel. In the East, it seems probable that it was, at one period, read in some churches on certain holydays, in the same manner as the legends of Saints were read on their festivals.† The oldest manuscript of it now known is referred to the tenth century.‡ It is evident, that the original History of Mary, like several other apocryphal books, was one of those collections of fables, which, being destitute of all authority, were recast in different forms by different hands. The same was the case, as we shall see, with the stories respecting our Lord's infancy and childhood. The Protevangelion is extant, with much diversity, in Latin :§ and in this language there is also another shorter and less extravagant work of a similar character.|| Of this the pretended Hebrew original was ascribed to the Apostle Matthew, and the translation to Jerome. The fiction by which Jerome is represented as its trans-

* Thilo. p. lx. seqq. ; p. xci. seqq. Conf. Epiphanius, Hæres. xxiv. § 12. p. 94.

† Thilo, pp. lix. lx.

‡ Ibid. p. liii.

§ The Latin version is published by Thilo under the title of "Historia de Nativitate Mariæ et de Infantiâ Salvatoris."

|| The modern title is "Evangelium de Nativitate S. Mariæ." It may be found in Fabricius, Jones, and Thilo.

lator shows that its composition must have been later than the fourth century.

We proceed to the Books of the Infancy.—As I have mentioned, the Author of the Homilies on Luke gives the title of a Gospel according to Thomas; and the same title is found in subsequent writers.* We may conjecture it to have been one of those professed expositions of Christianity which were called “gospels.” Nor is there any thing in the ancient writers who mention it to countenance a different supposition. But there is now extant in Greek a collection of fables concerning the infancy and childhood of Jesus, which is not, in the manuscripts of it, entitled “a gospel,” but the writer of which announces himself as Thomas an Israelite.† This book has been thought to be essentially the same with the gospel mentioned by the Author of the Homilies, and to have been in existence in the second century. But of such books, more or less resembling each other, there are a number extant, which have passed in modern times under the name of “Gospels of the Infancy.”

One of this number (much larger than the book ascribed to Thomas in its present state) is written in Arabic. It was published with a Latin translation in the year 1697, by Henry Sike, Professor of the Oriental languages in the University of Cambridge.‡ With this the name of Thomas is not connected. It consists of stories of pretended miracles, which accompanied the birth and infancy of our Saviour, and which he himself performed when a child. There is some fancy in these fictions. They have a tinge of eastern invention, but are essentially of the same character as the common legends of the Middle Ages. The relator sometimes refers to

* See Fabricius, i. 131, seqq. Thilo, lxxix. seqq.

† A fragment, the first part, of this book may be found in Fabricius and Jones. The whole, as now extant, is given by Thilo.

‡ The Latin version has been republished by Fabricius and Jones, and the original with the version, by Thilo.

facts in the Gospels, and connects his story with them. Thus he gives a narrative concerning two robbers, whom he represents as the same afterwards crucified with Jesus.* These and similar fables became popular in the East, particularly among the followers of Mahomet. Two of them appear in the Koran,† and others have been current among Mahometan writers.‡

The compilation in Greek that bears the name of Thomas has a general correspondence with the last half of the preceding. Omitting those pretended miracles which accompanied the nativity and infancy of Jesus, it begins with those performed in his childhood. Of these about half the stories in one work correspond to those in the other, though the order in which they are arranged is not the same, and they are often differently told. Both works imply a very low state of intellect and morals in those by whom, and for whom, they were written. In some of the fictions, Jesus, as a child, is represented as violent and cruel, so that his father, Joseph, is introduced as saying, "From this time we will not suffer him to go out of the house; for whoever makes him angry is killed."§ The notions of the writer of either book seem in this respect to have been derived from the use of power by an Oriental despot.

A similar collection of fables appears to be, or to have been, extant in different languages of the East.|| Several manuscript collections of them are extant in Latin, more or less diverse from each other, and from the Arabic and the Greek compilation. One only of these is known to bear the name of Thomas. The author's name is otherwise given as Matthew

* Cap. 23.

† One is of Christ's speaking while in his cradle (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, c. 1), which he did according to the Koran, ch. 3. vol. i. p. 58, and ch. 19. vol. ii. 145. The other is of his making birds of clay to which he gave life (Arabic Gospel, capp. 36, 46), which is referred to in the Koran, ch. 3. vol. i. p. 59, and ch. 5. vol. i. p. 139.

‡ See Sike's notes (republished by Thilo).

§ Arabic Gospel, c. 49. Gospel of Thomas, c. 14.

|| Thilo, p. xxxii. seqq.

the Evangelist, or James the son of Joseph (to whom the Protevangelion is ascribed); and in one copy the pretended authors are Onesimus and John the Evangelist.*

In regard to these fables respecting the infancy and childhood of Jesus, we find an early notice of one of them in Irenæus. He is giving an account of a sect, before mentioned, the Marcosians, who believed, like the Jewish cabalists, that there were profound mysteries hidden in the letters of the alphabet.† After speaking of their perversion of the Scriptures, Irenæus says;

“Moreover they bring forward an unspeakable number of apocryphal and spurious writings, which they have fabricated, to confound the simple, and such as are ignorant of those writings which contain the truth. To this end they also adopt that fiction concerning our Lord, that when he was a child, and learning the alphabet, his master, as usual, told him to say Alpha (A), and that upon his repeating Alpha, when his master next told him to say Beta (B), the Lord replied, ‘Do you first tell me what Alpha is, and then I will tell you what Beta is.’ And this they explain as showing that he alone knew the mystery, which he revealed, in the letter Alpha.”‡

We may first incidentally remark on this passage, that the many apocryphal books fabricated by the Marcosians could have had but a short-lived existence and were but of little note; since no one of them is specified by name in any writer; nor does Irenæus in his long article on the sect, nor any other writer, refer elsewhere to any use which the Marcosians made of them. It may next be observed, that the passage is remarkable as affording one of the only two examples, which are reported by the writers during the three centuries succeeding the death of our Lord, of an argument for a Gnostic doctrine, founded on a narrative concerning him

* Thilo, p. cv. seqq.

† See before, p. 259, seqq.

‡ Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 20. p. 91.

not related in the Gospels.* But that this narrative was already incorporated into a collection of like stories does not appear from Irenæus. His words, on the contrary, rather imply that it was not. "In addition," he says, to their apocryphal books, for this is the force of his language, "they adopt for the same purpose that fiction," a well-known fiction, as is implied, "concerning the Lord."†

This fiction has become the foundation of two different stories in the Arabic compilation,‡ and of three in the Greek,§ in the former our Saviour being represented as having had two successive schoolmasters, and in the latter, three; and, as might be expected from its antiquity, none of the fables of the same class appears to have been more widely circulated.||

* The other example which I refer to is the use, before mentioned (see p. 313, seqq.), which was made by the Encratites of a passage in the Gospel of the Egyptians.

† "Προσπαλαμβάνουσι δὲ εἰς τοῦτο καὶ κείνο τὸ ραδιούργημα," κ. τ. λ.

‡ Capp. 48, 49.

§ Capp. 6, 7, 8, 14, 15.

|| "As to the life of Jesus Christ," says Chardin, "the Persian legends contain not only what is in the Gospels, but likewise all the tales found in the legends of the Eastern Christians, and particularly in an Armenian legend, entitled *'Evangile Enfant*,* which is nothing but a tissue of fabulous miracles; such, for example, as that Jesus, seeing Joseph much troubled at having cut a board of cedar too short, said to him; 'Why are you so troubled? Give me one end of the board and pull the other, and it will grow longer.' Another story is, that being sent to school to learn the alphabet, his master directed him to pronounce A; he paused and said to his master, 'Tell me first, why the first letter of the alphabet is formed as it is.' Upon this, his master treating him as a talkative little child, he answered, 'I will not say A, till you tell me why the first letter is made as it is.' But his master growing angry, he said to him, 'I will instruct you then. The first letter of the alphabet is formed of three perpendicular lines on a horizontal line—the Armenian A is thus formed, very like an inverted *m*)—to teach us that the Beginning of all things is one Essence in three Persons.'" *Voyages en Perse*, Tome ii. pp. 269, 270. Ed. 4to. 1735.

The difference between the Armenian version of the story of the alphabet and that given by the Marcosians shows the changes to which fables of this sort were exposed.—Two stories different from each other, but both corresponding essentially, to the marvel of lengthening the cedar board, are found, one in the Arabic Gospel (c. 39), and the other in the Gospel of Thomas (c. 13).

* The title is so rendered by Chardin.

During a long interval after Irenæus, we hear nothing more of fables respecting the infancy and childhood of Christ. There is nothing necessarily miraculous in the supposed fact related in the story which he quotes; on the contrary, none but the Marcosians, or those who entertained like notions with them of the mysterious significance of the letters of the alphabet, could have inferred from it any supernatural knowledge in the infant Jesus. Epiphanius is the first writer who distinctly refers to stories of fabulous miracles performed by Jesus in his childhood; and these stories he does not altogether reject. The miracle at the marriage feast at Cana, he says, was the first performed by Jesus "except perhaps those which he is reported to have performed in his youth, in play as it were, according to what some say."* After him, Chrysostom expresses his opinion, that the miracle of Cana was the first performed by our Saviour, and rejects, as wholly undeserving of credit, the fables concerning miracles performed by him in his childhood.†

As regards the book now extant, of which the author calls himself Thomas, it could not have been that referred to by the Author of the Homilies on Luke, and subsequently by some other ancient writers, under the name of the Gospel of Thomas, for it is evidently a composition of the Middle Ages. All, it would seem, that can be meant by those modern writers who have regarded the two books as the same, is, that the one anciently called the gospel of Thomas served as a basis for the present compilation of fables. But the present book bears so thoroughly, in its matter and style, the character of an age far later than that in which the Gospel of Thomas is first mentioned, that should we attempt to separate this character from it, we should find that nothing would be left. Beside, of those different compilations of fables that have been mentioned, all essentially resembling

* Hæres. li. § 20. Opp. i. 442.

† Homil. in Joannem. xx. col. 132. Ed. 1697. Homil. xvi. col. 108. Homil. xxii. col. 124.

each other, none assumes the title of a gospel, and only one professes to have been written by an author called Thomas. The supposition, that the ancient Gospel of Thomas was so remarkable a book, as one containing a collection of stories respecting our Lord's childhood must have been regarded during the first three centuries, cannot be reconciled with the facts, that we are not informed of its contents by any ancient writer; that it is not quoted under that name by any ancient writer; that those who mention the fables do not speak of the Gospel of Thomas, and that those who mention the Gospel of Thomas do not speak of the fables.

But, it may be asked, were the fables contained in the Protevangelion and the Books of the Infancy ever really believed? The question falls into the same wide class with many others, to all which a common answer is to be given. Were the legends with which the whole history of Christendom was swarming from the fourth century to the fifteenth really believed? How was it with the mythology and marvels of Greek and Roman Paganism, interwoven as they were with the religious sentiments and rites and daily usages of the most enlightened nations of antiquity? Had the Egyptians a true faith that a particular bull was their god, Apis? Did they believe in the divinity of the Crocodile and the Ibis? What was their state of mind in respect to their other gods,—*qualia demens Ægyptus portenta colebat*,—with all the strange and disgusting histories attached to them? How has it been with the Hindoos, one of the few nations out of the European family, which have approached to European intelligence? Have they believed or not the enormous fables,—that even a healthy imagination shrinks from,—which are reported as true in their sacred books? How much of the history of human opinions on all the higher subjects of thought is a history of human errors,—often of errors the most repulsive to reason, yet widely prevailing, and obsti-

nately maintained from century to century. Have not those errors been believed?

The general answer to be given to these questions embraces the particular reply to the inquiry, by which they were suggested, respecting the fables of the Protevangelion and of the Books of the Infancy. Throughout the history of mankind, we find, as regards both facts and doctrines, the broadest exhibitions of credulity, which, if the delusion have passed away, or if we are out of the sphere of its influence, we can hardly help regarding as monstrous and unnatural, till we recollect how prevalent they have been, and consequently how consistent with our common nature. There are other avenues, more trodden than the narrow way of reason, by which opinions enter the mind. What impresses the imagination, affects the feelings, and is blended with habitual associations, is received by the generality as true. Fables however absurd, conceptions however irrational, even unmeaning forms of words which have been early presented to the mind, and with which it has been long conversant, make as vivid an impression upon it as realities, and assume their character. No opinions inhere more strongly than those about which the reason is not exercised; for they are unassailable by argument. It would be well to have different words to distinguish between the two different states of mind, in the one of which we receive conceptions as true without reasoning, while in the other our assent is given through an exercise of judgment. The term *to credit* is now used in one of its significations merely as synonymous with the term *to believe*. We might confine the use of the former term to denoting the first kind of assent, assent without the exercise of the understanding, and employ the latter only to signify a faith that relies on reason. Using the words in these senses, we might say, that the mass of errors which have been *credited* bears a vast disproportion to the amount of truths which have been *believed*. Nor shall we find it hard to conceive, nor regard it as a very extraordinary fact,

that the fables respecting the mother of our Lord and our Lord himself have been *credited*, as well as the doctrine of transubstantiation. Undoubtedly the world has grown wiser; or rather a small portion of the world has grown wiser; and we may hope, that the light will become less troubled, steadier, and brighter, and spread itself more widely. *Aliud ex alio clarescet. Res accendent lumina rebus.*

From what has appeared in this Chapter, it is evident that the Gnostics did not oppose to the four Gospels any other history of Christ's ministry; or, to state the conclusion in more general terms, it is evident, that, during the first three centuries, no history of Christ's ministry at variance with the four Gospels was in existence. The history of his ministry, such as it is contained in them, or in some one of them, served as a common basis for the opinions of all Christians, catholic or heretical.

If the Gospel of the Hebrews, in its uncorrupted state, was, as we have seen reason to believe, the Gospel of Matthew, then there is no probability that any work beside those of the Evangelists, professing to be an original history of our Lord's ministry, was ever in circulation after the appearance of the first three Gospels,—somewhere, probably, about the year 65.* Luke mentions imperfect accounts which preceded his own. But, after the appearance of the first three Gospels, though the copies of such accounts might not be destroyed, they would cease to be multiplied and circulated. We accordingly find no trace of their existence subsequent to the notice of them by Luke.

It may seem again as if nothing further were to be said. But, in order to exhaust the general subject we are considering, a few more remarks remain to be made concerning some supposed gospels, formerly mentioned.† It may be recollected, that Eichhorn maintains, that there were certain gospels in

* See Vol. i. pp. 112, 113.

† See Vol. i. pp. 61, 62.

common use during the second century previously to the use of the catholic Gospels, or even to the existence of the latter in their present state.* I have already had occasion to take notice of all the titles which he enumerates except two. These two, to which we will now attend, are "Gospels used by Tatian in composing his Diatessaron" and "The Gospel of Cerinthus."†

Tatian, the disciple of Justin Martyr, and the contemporary of Irenæus, became an ascetic, and a Gnostic of the Valentinian school. Respecting his Diatessaron, Theodoret, as we have formerly remarked,‡ speaks of his having found two hundred copies of it among the Christians of his diocese, which he removed, and supplied their place by copies of the Gospels. He says; "Tatian put together what is called 'The Gospel out of the Four,'" (that is, a gospel composed out of the four Gospels, a Diatessaron,) "cutting away the genealogies, and all else which shows that the Lord was born of the race of David according to the flesh. And this book is used not only by those of his sect, but by those who adhere to the doctrines of the Apostles; they not knowing the fraud in its composition, but using it in their simplicity as a compendious book."§ It is evident that Theodoret, with the book before his eyes, regarded it as a history of Christ compiled from the four Gospels; nor does he object any thing to it but the omissions which he specifies. Eusebius gives the same account of the composition of the book from the four Gospels; remarking in connection, that the Encratites, of which sect, he says, Tatian was the founder, used the Gospels. || And the same account is given by the other ancient writers who mention the Diatessaron. But, in opposition to all testimony and probability, it was fancied by Eichhorn, that Tatian

* See Vol. i. p. 5, seqq.

† "Cerinth's Evangelium." Eichhorn's Einleit. in das N. T., i. 107.

‡ See Vol. i. p. 32, 33.

§ Hæret. Fab. Lib. i. n. 20. Opp. iv. 208.

|| Hist. Eccles. Lib. iv. c. 29.

did not use our present four Gospels, but four others very like them ; *—so like them, it appears, that they were mistaken for them. There is not a sufficient show of argument in support of this conjecture to admit of any particular confutation. It may be worth while to discuss it, when the supposition can be rendered plausible, that in the time of Irenæus, simultaneously with our four Gospels, four other gospels existed very like them, but not the same. †

The Diatessaron of Tatian, then, is one among the abundant proofs of the use which the theosophic Gnostics made of the four Gospels, and of the authority which they ascribed to them.

We proceed to the supposed gospel of Cerinthus. Eichhorn quotes concerning this, two passages from Epiphanius, who is his sole authority.

That writer, in his account of the Cerinthians, affirms that they “used the Gospel of Matthew, not complete however,

* Einleit. in das N. T., i. 110-113.

† “Tatian’s Gospel,” says Eichhorn, “was called by many the Gospel of the Hebrews ;” and he asks, “Whence could this name have arisen except from the circumstance that that gospel served for its basis ?” The only authority for his assertion is a passage of Epiphanius.

Epiphanius, as his text now stands, says (Hæres. xlv. § 1. Opp. i. 391) ; “From Tatian those who are called Encratites derive their origin, partaking of the same venom, and it is said that ‘The Gospel out of the Four,’ which some call ‘The Gospel according to the Hebrews,’ was made by him.” But there can be no doubt, that the Diatessaron of Tatian and the Gospel of the Hebrews were very different books ; and the supposition, that the Hebrew Gospel of the Jewish Christians was written in Greek by a Gnostic toward the close of the second century is too gross an absurdity for any one to have entertained. Nor is there the least probability, that the title of “The Gospel according to the Hebrews” was ever common to the book to which it properly belonged and to Tatian’s Diatessaron. If the text of Epiphanius be correct, his assertion can only be reckoned as one among his numberless blunders. But it seems most probable that his text is corrupt ; and that, instead of *κατὰ Ἑβραίων*, “according to the Hebrews,” we should read *κατὰ Ἐγκρατῆτας*, “according to the Encratites.” This will accord with his speaking of Tatian’s Diatessaron in immediate connection with his mention of the Encratites as deriving their origin from him. They, of course, were likely to make particular use of his Diatessaron ; and this therefore might naturally be called by some “The Gospel according to the Encratites.”

but in part only ;” * and, in his account of the Ebionites, he says, that Cerinthus used the same Gospel of Matthew with the Ebionites, except that he retained the genealogy for the purpose of proving from it, that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary. †

Regarding Epiphanius as a trustworthy writer, and as being alone a sufficient representative of Christian antiquity, Eichhorn asserts, that “*it is undeniable that Christian antiquity ascribed to Cerinthus the use of Matthew’s Gospel, but with a shorter text ;*” ‡ and he infers, that the Gospel of Cerinthus was an earlier gospel than that of Matthew, that is to say, the Gospel which we now call Matthew’s in a yet imperfect state.§

It is needless to inquire by what process this might be inferred from the words of Epiphanius, supposing him to be a writer of good authority. As we have formerly seen, || he is entitled to no credit in his account of the Cerinthians. He has manufactured a sect, to which, ascribing the doctrines of the Ebionites, he has likewise ascribed the use of the Gospel of the Ebionites.

But there is another passage of Epiphanius, which Eichhorn

* Hæres. xxviii. § 5. p. 113.

† Ibid. xxx. § 14. p. 138.

‡ Einleitung in das N. T., i. 110.—It may be worth while here to take notice of what we might call an extraordinary oversight of Eichhorn, if such oversights did not often occur in the works of the modern theologians of Germany. Cerinthus is represented by all the ancient writers who pretend to give an account of him, as teaching that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary. But Eichhorn, after quoting his authority, Epiphanius, to this effect, proceeds, a few lines after (p. 108), to observe, that, as the gospel of Cerinthus had the genealogy of Jesus, so “it probably had also the whole *evangelium infantie* (gospel of the infancy) which is now contained in the first two chapters of Matthew.” That is to say, Eichhorn supposes, that though Cerinthus rejected the belief of the miraculous conception of our Lord, he received the account of it as authentic.

It is by conjectures which have more or less of a like character, and by critics equally inconsiderate, that the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels have been assailed in modern times in Germany. Among those critics I know of none who is to be ranked higher than Eichhorn for theological knowledge, clearness of mind, and power of reasoning.

§ Ibid. p. 109.

|| See before, pp. 45, 46.

has omitted to notice. It is in his account of the Alogi. Luke, he says, in the first words of his Gospel, "Since many have undertaken," that is, to write gospels, "points to some undertakers, as Cerinthus, Merinthus, and others."* He had before told us, that Cerinthus and his followers used the Gospel of Matthew with some omissions. He here tells us that Cerinthus wrote a gospel before Luke wrote his. Following him, therefore, as a well-informed and credible writer, and putting his different accounts together, we must conclude that Cerinthus was the original composer of Matthew's Gospel. Reasoning after a fashion, with which every one acquainted with modern German theology must be familiar, we might go on to infer, as highly probable, that Merinthus was the author of the Gospel of Mark. But here we should be met by a difficulty, arising from what Epiphanius elsewhere says, that he did not know whether Cerinthus and Merinthus were different persons, or only different names of the same person.† But the existence of the very early gospel of Merinthus, which, I believe, no one has yet undertaken to patronise, rests on as good ground as that of the gospel of Cerinthus.

In pursuing the inquiry concerning the supposed existence of Gnostic gospels, we have enabled ourselves to form a correct judgment of the character and importance of all those books which have been called apocryphal gospels; and of their bearing on the genuineness and authenticity of those four books, which, in ancient times, were universally recognised as the original histories of Christ's ministry, given by his immediate followers, or those who derived their knowledge from them. On the subject of apocryphal gospels there have been vague and incorrect notions, that have continued, in one form or other, down to our time, among those who have been disposed to invalidate the authority of the four Gospels. They cannot, perhaps, be more clearly or more briefly explained, than in the words of the Jew Orobio, in his celebrated con-

* Hæres. li. § 7. p. 428.

† Hæres. xxviii. § 8. p. 115.

troversy with Limborch respecting the truth of Christianity. "There were," he says "beside the four Gospels many others, some of which are referred to by Jerome* and other fathers, which were the foundation of different heresies. Such were the gospel to the Egyptians, that to the Hebrews, that of Thomas, that of Bartholomew, † that of the Twelve Apostles, ‡ that of Basilides, that of Harpocras, § and others that it would be superfluous to mention; every one of which had its adherents, and gave occasion to dispute. All these gospels, conflicting with one another in regard to the truth of the history, were in the course of time and by the authority of councils rejected; the four only being admitted in Europe, as corresponding best with each other." || On the ground of such statements it has been argued, in effect, that there were originally many various accounts of Christ's ministry, differing much from one another, so that the truth was altogether unsettled, and that our four Gospels, which had no particular claim to credit, obtained general currency to the exclusion of other works of the same kind, in consequence only of their finding favor with the prevalent party among Christians, and hence being sanctioned by the decrees of councils. Respecting this supposition it is here unnecessary to recur to that evidence for the universal reception of the four Gospels by the great body of Christians which shows it to be altogether

* The imperfect and erroneous view of the subject taken by Orobio is sufficiently evident from this reference to Jerome. Books which could have come into competition with the four Gospels must have been very conspicuous books long before the time of Jerome.

† This title is first mentioned by Jerome in his Proem to Matthew's Gospel. The existence of any book answering to it is doubtful.

‡ This was another title for the Gospel of the Hebrews. See before, p. 327, note.

§ By Harpocras must, it would seem, be meant Carpocrates, and Orobio, probably had in mind an indistinct recollection of a story of Epiphanius (*Hæres.* xxx. § 14. p. 138), that Carpocrates used the Gospel of Matthew, corrupted, in common with the Ebionites.—Except this title, and that of "The Gospel of Bartholomew," the others enumerated by Orobio have been already remarked upon.

|| The passage is quoted by Fabricius, i. 146.

untenable. In the present Chapter, we have examined, or adverted to, every book, real or supposed, passing under the name of a gospel, the title of which is mentioned by any writer before Epiphanius. Among them are the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel of Marcion. The existence of neither of these books can weaken the proof of the authority and general reception of the four Gospels. But it would be idle to suppose that any other of those which have been mentioned, was brought into competition with the four Gospels as a different history of Christ's ministry; and still more idle to suppose this of any book, the very title of which is not mentioned till after the middle of the fourth century.*

The main purpose of our inquiry respecting the Gnostics has been to determine whether they afford evidence for the genuineness of the Gospels. That they do afford such evidence has abundantly appeared. But something remains to be said. In the next Chapter we shall conclude with bringing into one view the facts already adduced in connection with others not yet adverted to, and attending to the relations and bearings of the whole.

* A degree of confusion and misapprehension respecting the subject of apocryphal gospels may have been produced by the fact, that Fabricius gives an account of such gospels under fifty titles, which, as the same book sometimes passed under two or more different titles, he supposes may represent about forty books (i. 335*, note). But in making this collection he has taken a very wide range. He has included writings which have no claim to the title of "gospel" either in the ancient or modern sense of the word; and he has brought his catalogue down to the year 1600, mentioning a History of Christ in Persian, published that year by the missionary Jerome Xavier, for the benefit of his converts. Many of the titles collected by him rest on no good authority. Some evidently had their origin in ignorance and misapprehension. With the exception of those which have been remarked upon, they are to be found only in writers from Epiphanius downward. Their alphabetical arrangement, however, tends, at first view, to give the impression, that one deserves as much attention as another. But, of the works mentioned by Fabricius, all that can with any reason be supposed to have been extant before the middle of the third century have been taken notice of in this Chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS AFFORDED BY THE
GNOSTICS.

THE facts that have been brought forward show in what manner the Gospels were regarded by the Gnostics. It has appeared, that the theosophic Gnostics recognised the authority of the four Gospels in common with the catholic Christians, while the Gospel used by the Marcionites was essentially the same with the Gospel of Luke. But we will now review those facts in connection with some others which have not yet been stated; and consider more particularly what inferences may be drawn from the whole. In pursuing the subject we will first confine our attention to the Marcionites.

An unjustifiable application of a principle common to all the Gnostics* led the Marcionites to reject certain passages from the text of Luke, and to decline any appeal to the authority of the three remaining Gospels. But the very principle on which they proceeded, that the Apostles and their followers were under the influence of Jewish prejudices, implies that they recognised the genuineness of the passages, and of the Gospels, which they rejected. It may be further remarked, that their having recourse to the mutilation of Luke's Gospel shows that no other history of Christ's ministry existed more favorable to their doctrines;—that, in the first half of the second century, when Marcion lived, there was no Gnostic gospel in being, to which he could appeal.

* See before, p. 291, seqq.

The fact that Marcion's gospel was founded on that of Luke proves the existence and authority of Luke's Gospel at the time when Marcion lived. We may, therefore, recur to the reasoning which has before been used, to show that the existence and authority of any one of the four Gospels at a particular period implies the contemporaneous existence and authority of the other three.* In proving their genuineness, if that reasoning be correct, they may be regarded as virtually one book. Had any other of the Gospels not existed together with that of Luke, at the commencement of the second century, or had it not then been regarded as of authority, it never could afterward have attained to the high estimation in which Luke's Gospel was held.

We will next attend to the broad distinction that was made between the Marcionites and the theosophic Gnostics in consequence of the fact, that the Marcionites admitted as of authority among the Gospels only their mutilated copy of Luke. On this ground Irenæus, as we have seen,† declined controverting their opinions in connection with those of the other Gnostics; and Tertullian, in confuting them, expressly limited himself to the use of their own gospel. The distinction was, that the Marcionites recognised only the authority of their own gospel; while the other Gnostics, as is thus testified by their opponents, appealed equally with the catholic Christians to the authority of all the four Gospels.

This is the concession of their opponents. But we will go on and see what further evidence of the fact exists.

I have repeatedly had occasion to refer to the letter of Ptolemy, the Valentinian, to Flora, in which he gives an account of his doctrines respecting the Supreme Being and the Creator. In this letter he says, that he shall prove what he asserts, "by the words of the Saviour, which only are an infallible guide to the apprehension of the truth;" and he accordingly confirms his positions throughout by quotations from

* See Vol. i. pp. 116-120.

† See before, p. 56.

the Gospels. In the conclusion of the letter, he introduces the mention of those apostolic traditions, to which the Gnostics appealed, but speaks of them only as an additional and subordinate means of knowledge. He promises to give further explanations founded "on the doctrine of the Apostles received by tradition; every thing at the same time being confirmed by the teaching of the Saviour, which must be taken as the standard." Heracleon, another Valentinian, who lived in the second century, and was highly esteemed, as we are told, by those of his own sect, wrote a commentary on the Gospel of John, which is often quoted by Origen. The views of the Basilidians respecting the Gospels may be inferred from the fact, that Basilides himself wrote a commentary on the Gospels.* Tatian, who was a Gnostic, composed, as we have seen, a Harmony of the Gospels.† And in the *Doctrina Orientalis*, the Gnostic writer appeals to the Gospels to countenance his opinions as freely as a catholic Christian might have done; and appeals to no other history of Christ. It is throughout to be kept in mind, that the theosophic Gnostics, while they thus used the Gospels, used no other books of the same class as of like authority; that they did not, any more than the catholic Christians, bring any other history of Christ's ministry into competition with them.

In treating of the doctrines of the theosophic Gnostics I have incidentally given examples of the use made by them of passages of the Gospels. Many more might be adduced. But a particular enumeration of passages to which they appealed is unnecessary, since their use of the Gospels is fully acknowledged by their catholic opponents.

Irenæus begins his work by charging them with deceiving men by "corrupting the oracles of the Lord, being evil interpreters of what has been well spoken."‡ He often remarks on their ingenuity in perverting the Scriptures. Speaking

* See before, pp. 310, 311.

† See before, pp. 340, 341.

‡ Lib. i. Præfat. § 1. p. 2.

particularly of the Valentinians, he says, "You see the method they use to deceive themselves, wresting the Scriptures and endeavouring to find support in them for their fictions."* He gives connectedly many passages from the Gospels which they applied to the proof of their doctrines, and afterwards confutes their interpretations.† He speaks of them as making use of every part of the Gospel of John.‡ I have already quoted a passage in which he says, that those heretics, in putting together detached passages of Scripture, resembled one who should separate the stones of a mosaic representing a king, and employ them to make the figure of a fox, or a dog;§ and another in which he compares their abundant use of Scripture language to the labor of one stringing together verses of Homer to form a cento.|| "There is such assurance," he says, "concerning the Gospels, that the heretics themselves bear testimony to them, and every one of them endeavours to prove his doctrine from them." "As, then, those who oppose us bear testimony in our favor, and use these Gospels, it follows, that what we have shown that the Gospels teach is established and true.¶

"There could not be heresies," says Tertullian, "if the Scriptures were incapable of being misinterpreted."** "They could not venture to show themselves without some pretence from the Scriptures."†† "The heretics plead their cause from the Scriptures, and draw their arguments from the Scriptures. Whence, indeed, could they draw their arguments concerning the subjects of faith except from the books of the faith?"‡‡

It appears, then, that the theosophic Gnostics abundantly appealed to the Scriptures, and particularly to the Gospels, in support of their opinions. The passages I have quoted,

* Lib. i. c. 9. § 1. p. 43.

† Lib. i. capp. 8, 9. pp. 35-47.

‡ Lib. iii. c. 11. § 7. p. 190.

§ Lib. i. c. 8. § 1. p. 36.

|| Lib. i. c. 9. § 4. p. 45, 46. Tertullian uses the same comparison, De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 39. p. 216.

¶ Lib. iii. c. 11. § 7. p. 189, 190.

** De Resurrectione Carnis, c. 40. p. 349.

†† Ibid. c. 63. p. 365.

‡‡ De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 14. p. 207.

and others of a similar character, are not to be considered as mere common testimony to this fact. They are the admissions of their opponents. So far as there was any ground for it, the catholic Christians were eager to charge the Gnostics with mutilating, rejecting, and undervaluing the writings of the New Testament. In the case of the Marcionites, this accusation was strongly urged. But, as respects the theosophic Gnostics, we have the testimony of the earliest and most elaborate writers against them, of Irenæus and Tertullian, that they made use of the Gospels, and other writings of the New Testament, and constantly appealed to them for proof of their doctrines, as freely as the catholic Christians.

The Marcionites made similar use of those portions of the New Testament the authority of which they admitted. This is abundantly apparent from Tertullian's whole controversy with them; and might be inferred simply from the fact that they did acknowledge the authority of those portions which they retained.

But the evidence which has been brought forward of the facts just stated, however conclusive, is not, perhaps, the most striking that may be adduced. There is a remarkable work of Tertullian, entitled "*De Præscriptione Hæreticorum*." The word *præscriptio*, used in this title, was a forensic term, denoting an exception taken by a defendant to the plaintiff's right to maintain an action. The title of Tertullian's work might be rendered "On the Plea in Bar against the Heretics." Its purpose is to show, that the Heretics should not be allowed to argue their cause from the Scriptures. The position which he maintains is; That the history of the catholic doctrine, and of the doctrines of the heretics, alone determines the former to be true and the latter false, without further inquiry. His argument proceeds as follows:

Christ, whoever he was, of whatever God he was the son, whatever was the substance of his divine and of his human

nature, whatever faith he taught, whatever rewards he promised, declared while on earth what he was, what he had been, the will of his Father, and the duty of man, either publicly to the people, or apart to his disciples. He sent forth his Apostles, who had been chosen by him for this purpose, to preach to the world the same doctrine which he had taught. They founded churches in every city where they went, from which other churches have been and were still derived. These all traced back their origin to the Apostles, and formed one great Apostolic church, held together in brotherhood by the reception of the same religion handed down to all.

But if Christ gave authority to his Apostles to preach his religion, no other expositors of it are to be listened to. What they preached is what he revealed; and in order to ascertain what they preached, we must recur to the churches which they founded, and instructed, orally and by their epistles. Whatever doctrine is held by those churches is true, as derived from the Apostles, and through them from Christ, and through Christ from God. Every other doctrine is false. But we, says Tertullian, hold communion with the Apostolic churches, there is no difference of belief between us and them; and this is the proof of the truth of our doctrines.*

The argument stated in its most concise form, it will be perceived, is this; that it was matter of history that the catholic churches had, from the days of the Apostles, held the same doctrines as they did in the time of Tertullian; and that these doctrines, therefore, were the original doctrines of the religion derived through the Apostles from Christ. It was equally a matter of history, he continues, that the founders of the principal heretical sects, Valentinus and Marcion, for instance, had lived after the times of the Apostles, and had introduced new doctrines not before held by the churches. If their doctrines were true, the churches had before been in error from the beginning. "Thousands of

* Capp. 20, 21. pp. 208, 209.

thousands had been baptised into a false religion." "Let them show me," says Tertullian, "by what authority they have come forward." "Let them prove themselves to be new Apostles; let them affirm that Christ has again descended; has again taught; has again been crucified; has again died, and has risen again. It was thus that he formed his Apostles, giving them moreover the power of working the same miracles which he did. I wish them to produce their miracles." *

The main scope of the reasoning of Tertullian is apparent. It is, he maintains, a well-known historical fact, that the catholic doctrine, as opposed to that of the Gnostics, has been held from the beginning, by the churches which the Apostles founded, and by all other churches in communion with them. This fact precludes the necessity of any further argument with those heretics. They have no claim to be heard in appealing to the Scriptures in support of their opinions.

Tertullian remarks at length upon the various objections which were made to his argument by different individuals, or by the same at different times. All of them, it may be observed, are founded on passages of the New Testament. With the exception of the last to be here mentioned, they have already been spoken of. The Gnostics sometimes said, that the Apostles did not know all things; † sometimes, that the Apostles had a public and a private doctrine, and did not communicate all truths openly to all; ‡ and finally, they contended, that the catholic churches, from the earliest times, had fallen into error through not understanding what the Apostles taught.

It is not necessary to dwell on the answers of Tertullian to these objections. His main argument, considering the early period when it was adduced, and its application as against the doctrines of the Gnostics, is, evidently, conclusive. I have given this brief account of it for the purpose of introducing the

* Capp. 29, 30. pp. 212, 213.

† See before, pp. 291, 292.

‡ See before, pp. 287-291.

reason which he assigns for urging it. This reason is, that in the controversy between the catholic Christians and the Gnostics, when the Gnostics were allowed to appeal to the Scriptures in proof of their doctrines, they argued so plausibly as to leave the victory uncertain; to make converts of some, and to instil doubts into others.

"We come then," he says, "to the subject proposed." "Our opponents put forward the Scriptures, and their boldness has an immediate effect upon some. In the first encounter, they fatigue the strong, they take captive the weak, and dismiss others with doubts. Here then I meet them at the onset; they are not to be admitted to argue from the Scriptures." *

"Will he for the sake of whose doubts you engage in an argument from the Scriptures be inclined in consequence more to the truth or to heresy? When he sees that you make no advance, that, the other party maintaining his ground, you both equally deny and defend, he will surely go away from this conflict more uncertain than before, and ignorant on which side the heresy lies." †

"The appeal therefore is not to be made to the Scriptures; nor is the decision of the controversy to be rested on them, for they will afford no victory or an uncertain one, or one no better than uncertain. Even though the mutual appeal to Scripture should not leave each party on an equality,‡ yet the order of things demands, that that consideration should be first brought forward which is the sole subject of the present argument; To whom does the faith [the religion] itself belong? Whose are the Scriptures? From whom, and through whom, and when, and to whom, was the instruction delivered, by which men are made Christians? For, wherever it may appear that the true Christian instruction and faith are to be found, there will be the true Scriptures,

* Cap. 15. p. 207.

† Cap. 18. p. 208.

‡ I adopt the reading, "ut utramque partem parem sisteret."

and their true exposition, and all true Christian traditions." *

Thus it appears, that, whatever difficulties the theosophic Gnostics found in reconciling their doctrines with the New Testament, they recognised the necessity of doing so; that they were ready to meet their opponents on this ground; that they furnished plausible explanations of those difficulties, and drew from the New Testament plausible arguments in their own favor. But this is but a partial statement. The theosophic Gnostics appealed to the Gospels as freely and as confidently as did the catholic Christians; contending, that they alone had the true key to their meaning, and that other Christians, not being spiritual, could not comprehend their hidden and higher senses. They believed, indeed, that the Apostles and Evangelists were not infallible; that they were liable to human errors, and that they were affected by prejudices and false opinions, common to their countrymen, which had been implanted in their minds in childhood, had grown with their growth, and had not been wholly eradicated. But the theosophic Gnostics, who allegorized and spiritualized the words of the Gospels, had not the same occasion to misapply this principle as the Marcionites, who were not allegorists. The Marcionites regarded the Gospels as colored throughout by the Jewish prejudices of their writers. But, by taking the work of him whom they considered as the most enlightened of the Evangelists, St. Luke, and rejecting from it some errors, they thought themselves able to obtain a history altogether correct; and this was the basis of their system.

Still had any seemingly credible history of Christ's ministry existed, more favorable to the opinions of the Gnostics than the four Gospels, there can be no doubt that they would have used that history in preference. The manner, therefore, in which they appealed to the four Gospels, or to the history

* Cap. 19. p. 208.

of Christ as contained in the Gospel of Luke, without bringing any Gnostic history into competition with them, is proof that no such history existed. All Christians, the catholics, the theosophic Gnostics, the Marcionites, and, as we have before seen, the Hebrew Christians, were equally ignorant of any history of Christ's ministry different from that given by the Evangelists. No party relied on any other; no party had any other to produce.

But it has been suggested or implied, that the early founders of the Gnostic sects drew their systems from their philosophy, and connected them only with some general belief, that the coming of Christ was a manifestation of the Supreme God for the purpose of delivering men from moral evil and its consequences; and that it was merely by way of reasoning *ad hominem* with the catholic Christians, that the Gnostics made use of the Gospels.* Let us try the probability of this supposition by applying it to a particular case, that of the Valentinians.

We have seen, that the Valentinians so fully, and in such various ways, professed their belief in the truth of the Gospels, that their opponents did not accuse them of denying it; though this charge would unquestionably have been brought against them, had there been a foundation for it. But they made use of the Gospels, it may be said, not in good faith; they quoted them only "to satisfy those who demanded proofs from Scripture;" † or undertook to explain them by way of answering the objections of those who regarded the Gospels as of authority. The statements already made show that these suppositions have no probability to recommend them; but let us examine a little further. According to this hypothesis, the Valentinians did not believe the authenticity and genuineness of the Gospels; they did not sincerely re-

* See, for example, Walch's *Historie der Ketzereien*, i. 347. Matter, *Histoire du Gnosticisme*, ii. 172, 190.

† Walch, *ubi supra*.

cognise their authority; they did not believe them to favor their own opinions; and, consequently, they did not believe them to teach what they thought true Christianity. At the same time, it is evident that these books were principally relied on by their opponents as a store-house of arguments against them. We have, indeed, no reason to doubt that there was a foundation for the strong language which has been quoted from Tertullian, respecting their skilful and successful use of the Scriptures. We may believe, that the Gnostics sometimes made converts from among the catholic Christians, and showed much talent, after the fashion of their times, in reconciling their doctrines with the New Testament, and in persuading themselves and others, that they were indicated in the parables, or supported by the declarations of Christ, as recorded in the Gospels. But after all, it is evident that the Gospels do not teach the Gnostic doctrines, but do teach what is irreconcilable with those doctrines. It is equally certain, that this fact was recognised by a great majority of early believers (for the catholic Christians far outnumbered the Gnostics), and even by a very large and respectable portion of the Gnostics themselves, the Marcionites, as appears from the expedient, to which they had recourse, of rejecting the use of three of the Gospels, and mutilating that which they retained. Would the Valentinians, then, have professed to regard those books as authentic, had there been good reasons for questioning their authenticity? Is it credible that they would, with such a consistent show of conviction as to deceive and silence their opponents, have professed their belief in the truth of the Gospels, had they not believed them true? So far from it, they would at once have seized on the triumph, or at least the advantage, which was evidently in their power, could the genuineness and authority of the books relied on by their opponents have been fairly denied, or fairly questioned. The course to be pursued would have been clear; and neither an honest man, nor a controvertist of common ability, could have neglected

to take it. The Valentinians, and the other theosophic Gnostics, would not have persisted in dishonestly affirming, or implying, their belief of the authenticity of books, which they did not believe to be authentic, and which furnished their opponents with arguments against their doctrines, conclusive in themselves, and by most regarded as conclusive.

Let us view the subject under another aspect. The Gospels were either known to Valentinus himself, or they were not. If they were known to him, they were either regarded by him as genuine and authentic, or they were not. He lived at so early an age, in the first half of the second century, that no question could have existed in his time, whether they were entitled to that character. The fact must have been known, either that they were, or that they were not, entitled to it. If he regarded them as genuine and authentic, there can be no doubt that they were so regarded by his followers, and by the great body of contemporary Christians; and our inquiry is at an end. Let us suppose, then, either that they were not known to him, that they were not in existence; or that, being known to him, they were rejected by him as unworthy of credit. In either case, he built his system on other foundations, and supported it by other arguments, than what those books might afford. In either case, it is evident that his followers would never have admitted or implied the truth of the Gospels. They would never have consented to receive as genuine and authentic, books not known to their master, or which he had rejected,—books, which they themselves must have believed to be the fabrications of opponents, who had excluded him and them from their community, and which furnished those opponents with the strongest arguments against what they regarded as true Christianity. They would not have exposed themselves to such expostulations as those of Tertullian: “If they are heretics, they are not Christians, not deriving their doctrine from Christ. Not being Christians, they have no property in the books of Christians. It may justly be said to them, Who are you?

When and whence did you come? What are you, who do not belong to me, doing on my premises? By what right, Marcion, do you cut down my woods? By what license, Valentinus, do you divert the water of my springs? By what authority, Apelles, are you removing my landmarks? How is it, that you others are sowing and pasturing here at your pleasure? It is my possession; I have possessed it of old; I trace back my title to its original source; I am heir of the Apostles."* To such language it would have required neither an acute nor an angry controvertist to give the answer, that this disputed possession was not worth claiming, could such an answer have been given with truth.

In examining (in the Second Part of this work) the direct historical evidence of the genuineness of the Gospels, we have seen that it does not mainly consist, as in the case of other books, of assertions and implications of individual writers concerning their authorship. It rests on the fact, that they were universally received, as the works of those to whom they are ascribed, by the great body of catholic Christians at so early a period that no mistake on the subject could have been committed; and on another consideration of equal weight, that this general reception of the Gospels as genuine, wherever Christianity had been preached, is a phenomenon which can be accounted for only on the supposition of their genuineness.

But, in turning from the catholic Christians to the Gnostics, it might not be unreasonable to apprehend, considering the opposition in which the two parties stood to each other, that something would appear to cloud the testimony of the former, and, perhaps, to shake our confidence in it as conclusive. Certainly had there been, during the first ages of Christianity, any doubt concerning the genuineness of the Gospels, we should have learned it from the Gnostics. But, so far from any doubt being suggested by the examination

* De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 37. p. 215.

which we have gone through, we find the Gnostics strongly confirming the testimony of their catholic opponents. Valentinus and Basilides carry us back to the earlier part of the second century;* and they, in common with the catholic Christians, received the Gospels as the authentic histories of the ministry of Christ. About the same period Marcion affords his evidence to the general reception of one of the Gospels, and, consequently, as we have seen, proof of the reception of the other three.† On the Gospels, or, to include the case of the Marcionites and the Hebrew Christians, on a history of Christ, such as is found in one of the Gospels, every form of Christian faith rested as its foundation. No history presenting a different view of his ministry was in existence.

Here, then, we conclude our statement of the historical evidence, both direct and subsidiary, of the genuineness of the Gospels. The catholic Christians bear testimony to their having been written by the particular individuals to whom they are ascribed. The Gnostics confirm this testimony by the proofs which they afford of their general reception and authority.

We have pursued this investigation carefully and at length, as if there were some intrinsic improbability in the proposition, that the Gospels were written by the authors to whom they are ascribed,—some presumption against it, such as to require a patient removal of difficulties, and an accumulation of strong evidence, to establish its truth. But, on the contrary, it is apparent that the Gospels were written by early believers in our Lord; there is not a show of evidence, that they were written by any other believers than those to whom they have been ascribed; and nothing is more probable, than that some of his immediate disciples, or of their intimate companions, should have left us such narratives of his life.

* See before, pp. 50, 51.

† See before, p. 347.

The founder of our religion, whether one believe, or not, that he was authorized by God to speak in his name, was unquestionably the most wonderful individual who ever appeared on earth. A Jew, a Galilæan, in humble life, poor, without literary culture, without worldly power or influence ; teaching but for a short time (probably not more than two years) ; wandering about the shores of the lake of Galilee and of the Jordan ; scarcely entering Jerusalem but to be driven away by persecution, till at last he went thither to perish under it ; collecting during his lifetime only a small body of illiterate, and often wavering, followers ; addressing men whose incapacity, prejudices, or hatred, continually led them to mistake or to pervert his meaning ; surrounded, and apparently overpowered, by his unbelieving countrymen, who regarded him as a blasphemer, and caused him to suffer the death of the most unpitied of malefactors,—this person has wrought an effect, to which there is nothing parallel, on the opinions and on the condition of the most enlightened portion of our race. The moral civilization of the world, the noblest conceptions which men have entertained of religion, of their nature and of their duties, are to be traced back directly to him. They come to us not from the groves of the Academy, not from the walks by the Ilissus which Aristotle frequented, nor from the Painted Portico of Athens where Zeno taught ; but from the mountain on which Jesus delivered his first recorded discourse ; from the synagogue and the streets of the small town of Capernaum, of which not a ruin remains to fix its site ; from fishing-boats on the lake of Galilee ; from the less inhabited tracts,—the deserts, as they have been called,—of Palestine ; from the courts of the Jewish temple, where he who spoke was confronting men plotting his destruction ; from the cross of one expiring in agony amid the savage triumph of his enemies. After witnessing such a death, his disciples lost all their doubts. They affirmed their master to be the Saviour of the World, the Son of God. They devoted themselves to labor and suffer, and, if need were, to die, in

making him known to men. What they strove to impress upon the minds of others was what, as they asserted, he had done and taught. They "knew nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." It was the history, real or pretended, of his ministry on earth, which was the basis of all their teaching, the essential instruction to be first communicated to all who were summoned to put their trust in him,—to take up their cross, and follow him in the new path which he had opened from earth to heaven. Now there can be no supposition more irrational, than that the history of Christ, which was thus promulgated by all his first disciples, and received by all their first converts, was lost before the beginning of the second century, and another history substituted in its place. But, if the Gospels contain the history of Christ as it was promulgated by his Apostles, there can be no ground for doubting, that they were written by the authors to whom they are ascribed, by Apostles and companions of Apostles.

To all the weight of evidence, that the Gospels were written by the authors to whom they have been ascribed, what other account of their origin has been or may be opposed? The genuineness of the Gospel of John has been directly impugned by some modern German theologians. Their hypotheses are, necessarily, only developments of one essential proposition, that this Gospel is a spurious work, fraudulently ascribed to the Apostle by its original writer, or by some other individual, or individuals. There can be no direct evidence of the truth of this supposition; and with it another must be connected, namely, that this imagined fraud was so successful as to impose on all Christians, catholic and heretical, from the beginning of the second century. But, if this be a moral impossibility, then there is a moral certainty, that the Gospel ascribed to John was the work of that Apostle. Yet this brief statement, decisive as it may be, gives but a very imperfect view of those facts and considerations, hereto-

fore presented, which show that any other supposition is altogether incredible.

In respect to the other three Gospels, the attacks on their genuineness and authenticity by many of the modern German theologians have been more elaborate. But, if their genuineness be denied, there are only two fundamental suppositions, one or the other of which must be made. One is of the same nature with that which has been advanced concerning St. John's Gospel. It may be asserted, that each of them is a spurious work of some *one* unknown author. But this supposition has been generally felt to be too indefensible. Recourse has therefore been had to different hypotheses, which may all be resolved into one fundamental supposition, that the first three Gospels are, respectively, aggregates of stories by different hands, brought together by different compilers. In the First Part of this work, we have examined this supposition under as plausible a form as any in which it has appeared ; and, if the view there taken of the subject be correct, there is something like mathematical demonstration of its falsity. But, so far as those hypotheses are connected, as they have been, with the supposition that the narratives contained in the first three Gospels are distorted and discolored by tradition, there is a moral demonstration of their falsity. The character of Jesus Christ, as exhibited in any one of the first three Gospels, or in all of them taken together, is equally consistent and wonderful. It is, at the same time, a character to which nothing in human history, before or after, presents a parallel or a resemblance. He appears as one, acting under the miraculous conviction that he was the instrument of God, to assure men, on His authority, of their relations to Him and to eternity ; and this conception of his character is fully sustained. In the midst of men, who appear, as we should expect the Jews of that age to appear, ignorant, narrow-minded, dull in their perceptions, indocile, many of them hating him with all the hatred of bigotry ; throughout trials of every sort ; under external circumstances so

humiliating that we shrink from the thought of them, he shows always the same unalterable elevation of character, requiring no human support. We feel that he was not to be degraded by any insult; and that no praise could have been addressed to him, had it come from the highest of men, which would not have been a strange impertinence. If our natural feelings have been unperverted, we follow him, if not with the conviction,—that conviction has been resisted,—but certainly with a sentiment, continually prompting us to say, “Truly, this was the Son of God.” But it is folly to suppose, that such a portraiture of character could have been the result of an aggregation of fabulous traditionary stories, which had been moulded by different minds, Jewish or Gentile. The comparison is unworthy of the subject, but it would not be more absurd to imagine, that the finest works of ancient plastic art,—the display of perfect physical beauty in the Apollo Belvidere,—had been produced by putting together the labors of different artists at different times, all working without a model, this making one part or member, and that another.

We may enter on the inquiry respecting the genuineness of the Gospels merely as scholars and critics, without any previous opinion respecting their contents. To a thinking man, whatever may be his opinion, it must appear an object of great curiosity to determine the authorship of books so extraordinary, and which have had such vast influence. In treating the historical evidence for their genuineness, we deal with historical facts, and our reasoning is of a kind with which we are familiar, and which is fully within the cognizance of our judgment. But if, from the preceding examination of this evidence, it appears that the Gospels are the works of those to whom they have been ascribed, then the argument we have pursued, and which we ought to pursue, merely as scholars and critics, or, I may better say, as intelligent men, capable of understanding the force of reasoning,

leads to results of the deepest moment. Upon arriving at the end of our journey, on quitting the detail of history and criticism, through which it has lain, considerations of another class present themselves to view; we see rising before us objects the most solemn and sublime; we have been brought to the contemplation of all that is of permanent and essential interest to man. Let us examine the reasoning thoroughly as logicians; but, if it will bear this examination, then the conclusion to which it leads is to be regarded with very different feelings from what may have been called forth during its process. If the Gospels were written by the authors to whom they are ascribed, two of them by individuals who were intimate companions of Jesus, eyewitnesses of his ministry, who knew the facts, whatever they were, of his public life, and the other two, by three who received their accounts immediately from such eyewitnesses; then the narrative of his ministry contained in the Gospels is true. The Apostles could not have been deceived respecting the facts which they profess to relate. If Jesus Christ did not, by a series of miracles performed before crowds of spectators, by his doctrines, and by an exhibition of character, altogether conformed to his claims, give full evidence of his being authorized to speak in the name of God, then the Gospels are not a collection of legends, the growth of tradition in an ignorant and marvel-loving age,—that supposition is excluded by the proof of their genuineness,—they are throughout a tissue of monstrous and inexplicable falsehoods. If the Gospels be genuine, there are but two conclusions which are possible. The narrative of the public life of Jesus contained in them is either essentially true, or it is essentially false; and if false, it is so thoroughly false, that we know nothing concerning his character and actions. His immediate followers have buried his history under a mass of prodigious fictions; and these fictions they propagated, in the face of his enemies and their own, among those whom they affirmed to have witnessed the pretended events which they related. The true history of Jesus Christ, of him who really

has wrought such vast changes in the condition of men, is unknown; and, instead of it, we have a fiction of inexpressible grandeur, the conception of some Jews of Galilee, fishermen, tax-gatherers, and others, who were shamelessly and recklessly destitute of veracity. But we have brought the argument to an absurdity so repulsive, that it would be equally offensive and unprofitable to dwell on it longer.

It follows, then, that the history of Jesus contained in the Gospels is true. The essential facts of religion have been expressly made known to men on the authority of God. They are facts, glorious, solemn, overwhelming, but as real as the ordinary objects of every-day life; certain, as nothing future in life can be. In our day the belief of these facts is openly rejected; the evidence of them is continually assailed directly and indirectly; baseless and thoroughly irreligious speculations are confidently put forth and widely received as substitutes for Christian faith, of which, as in mockery, they assume the name; and there are many who acquiesce in a general notion that religion may be true, and who regard this notion as a source of consolation and hope, without any such settled conviction of its truth as may essentially affect their characters. But if there be a God in whose infinite goodness we and all beings are embosomed, if there be a future life which spreads before us, and all whom we love, exhaustless scenes of attainable happiness; if that Infinite Being, who so eludes the grasp of human thought, have really brought himself into direct communication with mankind; if the character of Jesus Christ be not an inexplicable riddle, but a wonderful reality, these are truths of which a wise man may well desire fully to assure himself. And perhaps there is no way in which he may attain a stronger feeling of certainty, than when he approaches them as we have done, through reasoning conversant about ordinary subjects of thought, requiring no exercise of judgment beyond the common capacity of every intelligent man, not taking us into the dim light of metaphysical inquiry, involving the use of no uncertain language, and calling forth

no doubts from that region which lies on every side beyond the bounds of our knowledge and our powers. The way which we have travelled is such that it may by contrast heighten the effect of the prospect on which it opens. It is somewhat as if, by an easy ascent, we found ourselves standing on a vast height with the unbounded ocean spreading out before us.

But, however convinced we may be of the genuineness of the Gospels, one distinct and very important branch of the evidence of that fact has not yet been treated. It is the evidence founded on the intrinsic character of the Gospels themselves, evidence in which the proofs of their genuineness and their truth are essentially blended together. The main proposition to be established by it, is, that the Gospels are of such a character, that they could have been written only by individuals of such a character, and so circumstanced, as those to whom they are ascribed.

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

NOTE A.

(See p. 39.)

ON THE STATUE WHICH IS SAID BY JUSTIN MARTYR, AND OTHERS, TO HAVE BEEN ERECTED AT ROME TO SIMON MAGUS.

I HAVE observed, on the page referred to above, that "Justin says there was at Rome a statue dedicated to Simon as a God." By thus quoting him I have implied, that I regard his account, *so far as it relates to the existence of the statue*, as probably true. It is confirmed by the notices of a series of subsequent Christian writers. But it has been discredited by the generality of the learned among Protestants in modern times. Whether or not his testimony to the existence of the statue be true, becomes, therefore, a question of considerable curiosity, involving several others in its decision. These are;—Whether Justin, and the other Christian writers, who for more than two centuries after his death speak of the statue, are to be condemned for gross negligence and credulity?—or, Whether a great majority of modern scholars among Protestants, including some of the most learned and judicious, have unreasonably rejected the account?—and still another, more general in its character, which may be thus explained. As far as relates to the present subject, it would be idle to discriminate the Christian from the Pagan writers of antiquity. In both we may find errors of fact in abundance, occasioned, in great part, by the very imperfect means of information in ancient times. But the present inquiry relates to a public object of sight, the existence or non-existence of which must, for several years at least (we know not how long), have been capable of being ascertained by any inhabitant or visiter of the principal city of the

ancient world : and the question, therefore, arises, Whether in relation to such an object, the uncontradicted testimony of a series of ancient writers for more than two centuries may be rejected as fabulous ?

Justin's account of this statue is to be found in his First Apology, where it is twice mentioned. He says ;

"After the return of Christ to heaven, the demons put forward certain men, calling themselves gods ; who not only were not persecuted, but were honored by you. Such was Simon, a certain Samaritan, who, during the reign of Claudius Cæsar, having performed magical works, through the art and power of demons, in your imperial city of Rome, was accounted a god, and has been honored by you with a statue as a god, which statue has been erected on the island in the Tiber, between the two bridges, with this inscription in Latin, *Simoni Deo Sancto* ; and almost all the Samaritans, and a few also among other nations, acknowledge and worship him as the First God."*

He thus recurs to the subject :

"As I have before said, Simon being with you in the imperial city of Rome, during the reign of Claudius Cæsar, he so astonished and deluded the sacred Senate and the Roman people, as to be accounted a god, and to be honored with a statue, as the other gods are honored by you. Whence I beg that you [the Emperor, or the Emperor and the Cæsars] would make the sacred Senate and your people acquainted with this our supplication ; so that if any one be entangled in his doctrines, he may learn the truth, and be able to escape from error. And, if it be your pleasure, let the statue be destroyed."†

Respecting these passages, it is, in the first place, to be observed, that there are two quite distinct points to which Justin's statements relate. On the one hand, he testifies to the existence of the statue in his own day ; on the other, he gives an account of the circumstances which he believed to have attended its erection, an event which he supposed to have occurred about a century before he wrote. Whatever mistake he may have committed respecting the circumstances attending its erection, does not tend in any degree to invalidate his testimony to its existence. Considering the frequency of great errors concerning historical facts in ancient authors, it would be nothing remarkable, if Justin should have given a wrong account of the dedication of the statue. But if there were no statue to Simon at Rome in the place

* I. Apologia, pp. 38-40.

† I. Apologia, p. 84.

which he specifies, his blunder (for the supposition of falsehood is wholly out of the question) must be regarded as very extraordinary.

The account of Justin has been canvassed, as if he had asserted, in the passage last quoted, that the Romans had enrolled Simon among their national gods by a public act of the state. But it is evident, to say the least, that he does not assert this in express words. What he does say is, that Simon produced such an effect at Rome, so deluded both high and low, the sacred Senate and the common people, that in consequence he was honored with a statue as a god; but by whom this statue was erected he does not say. If it had been by a public act, it must have been by a decree of the Senate at the proposal, or at least with the concurrence, of the Emperor. It must have been virtually an act of the Emperor. But the Emperor is not referred to by Justin as concerned in the honors paid to Simon. Justin does, however, speak of the effect which that impostor produced on the people (in connection with the Senate), as preparing the way for them. But the people could have taken no part in any public act for the deification of Simon; as before the time of Claudius, that is, since the reign of Tiberius, they had not had even a nominal share in the government.

But there was a decree of Claudius, which may, perhaps, serve to explain the passage in Justin, and more particularly some later accounts of the dedication of the statue. Dion Cassius relates, that, in the time of Claudius, Rome was filled with effigies, there having been no restriction to prevent any one from putting up his own picture or statue; but that the Emperor "removed the most of them, and forbade private persons thus to put up their effigies without obtaining permission from the Senate, unless they were erecting or repairing some building; for, in that case, he gave permission to them, and their relations, to set up their effigies in such places."* Though this edict, as reported by Dion, merely prohibits (except in a particular case) the setting up of one's own effigy without the sanction of public authority, yet it cannot be supposed that this sanction was not equally necessary for such as wished

* Dion. Hist. Rom. in Claudio. Lib. lx. § 25. p. 962. Ed. Reimari.—The passage is quoted by Van Dale in his dissertation "De Statuâ Simoni Mago erectâ," published in his work "De Oraculis Veterum Ethnicorum," (p. 589. Ed. secund.) It is quoted by him in proof that the numerous statues with which Rome was crowded were statues of men, not of gods; and he does not appear to have observed that it had any other bearing on the question.—Van Dale is commonly referred to as having most fully stated the objections to Justin's account.

to set up the effigy of another. The reason given for the decree was equally applicable to the one case as the other; and had private persons been allowed to set up effigies of whomever they would, except their own, it is evident that the decree would have been nugatory from the ease with which it might be evaded. It follows, therefore, that those who set up the statue to Simon, if it were erected after this decree, must have obtained the permission of the Senate, and consequently the sanction of the Emperor. This may serve to explain the language of Justin, so far as it implies a public assent to its being set up; and still more to account for that of Irenæus, who says, that "Simon was, as it is reported, honored with a statue by Claudius Cæsar on account of his magical powers;"* and that of Cyril of Jerusalem (in the fourth century), who says, that "Simon so deceived the citizens of Rome, that Claudius erected his statue" with the inscription mentioned by Justin.†

But it is a matter of little interest, how far Justin was correct in the vague account that he gives of the circumstances attending the erection of the statue, which it is not probable he could have learned except from oral tradition. Nor is any one called upon to defend the later report, that it was erected by Claudius, the origin of which, as has just been suggested, may not improbably be found in the circumstance, that his sanction was necessary to its erection. The only question of importance is, Whether Justin affirmed, with such particularity and earnestness, the existence of a statue which did not exist, and led a series of writers into the same error, an error which, as we shall see, remained uncontradicted by their opponents.

The credit of Justin's account was first shaken by the discovery, in the year 1574, on the island in the Tiber, the place mentioned by him, of a stone, which had been apparently the base of a small statue, with an inscription to Semo Sancus, an ancient Sabine god.‡ It was concluded that Justin had mistaken the inscription to Semo Sancus for one to Simon. As a specimen of the manner in which he has since been treated by the coarser class of critics, I may quote what is said by Middleton, a writer of much celebrity in his day.

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. i. c. 23. § 1. p. 99.

† Cataphesis vi. § 9. Opp. p. 89. Ed. Milles.

‡ This discovery is mentioned, and an account of the stone is given, by Baronius, in his Annals, under the year of Christ 44. § lv. Tom. i. p. 328. Ed. 1610.

Justin, "in his Apology, addressed to the Emperor and Senate of Rome, charges them with paying divine honors to the heretic and impostor, Simon, of Samaria, commonly called the Magician: and for the truth of his charge appeals to a statue, then subsisting in Rome, and publicly dedicated to that Simon in the Island of the Tiber, with this inscription, *Simoni Deo Sancto*. But it is manifest beyond all reasonable doubt, as some learned men have shown, that Justin was led here into a gross blunder, by his usual want of judgment and knowledge of Roman affairs, and his pre-conceived belief of certain fabulous stories, which passed current about this Simon among the first Christians; for the statue and inscription, to which he appeals, were not dedicated to his countryman, Simon Magus, of whose deification there is not the least hint in any Roman writer, but to a Sabine Deity, of ancient worship in Rome, and of similiar name, *Semoni Sanco*, frequently mentioned by the old writers; as the inscription itself, dug up, about two centuries ago, from the ruins of that very place, or little island, which Justin describes, has clearly demonstrated."*

Middleton regards the finding, or rather the existence, of this inscription, as affording *clear demonstration* that Justin committed a gross

* Middleton's "Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers," &c. pp. 40, 41.—Middleton in this work attacks the fathers as he might have done contemporaries with whom he was engaged in an angry controversy. He confounds together those of all times and of all characters. He had no sympathy with the virtues of the early Christians; and shows no capacity of estimating men living under influences different from those acting on himself. He judges of the writings of the fathers, as if they had been the writings of persons within the circle of his acquaintance. From the erroneous standard which he thus sets up, and from the spirit in which he carries on the controversy, his book, so far as their characters are concerned, is a misrepresentation throughout. But beside the false light under which every thing is exhibited, there is often in his statements an unscholarlike looseness of assertion, by which alone they are accommodated to his purpose. Thus, in proof of Justin's weakness of mind, he alleges the fact, that he was a believer in the millennial reign of Christ on earth (p. 31). This is true; and it is also true, that an unprejudiced man of sense, conversant with the history of opinions, would hardly think of mentioning it, as an item toward forming a judgment of Justin's character. But Middleton adds, that Justin believed that "*the saints should reign with Christ in Jerusalem, in the enjoyment of all sensual pleasures.*" This is not true; nor is there any foundation for the assertion; though Middleton pretends to quote, in a translation, the words of Justin, and in a note gives the beginning of the passage to which he refers, breaking off with an "&c."

blunder. On the contrary, this fact alone affords no ground for supposing him to be in error. That it casts no discredit on his account will appear at once, if we consider that there would be no improbability in the account of an ancient writer, who, in enumerating the statues on the island in the Tiber, should mention one to Semo Sancus, and another to Simon. Justin says that there was on the island a statue to Simon Magus; it appears that there was one to Semo Sancus. There is no incongruity between the two facts; nor does the latter tend in any degree to create a presumption against the former. In one case only can the existence of the inscription to Semo Sancus have any bearing on the question. If the account of Justin, so far as it relates simply to the existence of the statue to Simon, be in itself improbable, then the existence of the inscription to Semo Sancus may serve to strengthen our doubts, so far as it may furnish a probable explanation of Justin's supposed mistake. We will, therefore, consider whether it could in any case furnish such an explanation.

Justin says the inscription of the statue of which he speaks was

SIMONI DEO SANCTO.

The inscription found, omitting the titles of the individual by whom it was set up, runs thus;*

SEMONI
SANCO
DEO. FIDIO
SACRUM
SEX. POMPEIUS. SP. F.
* * * * *
DONUM. DEDIT.

Upon this, it may first be observed, that, if we suppose Justin to affirm, that the statue of which he speaks was erected by public authority, he could not have referred to the statue of Semo Sancus, with its inscription, by which it appears that it was set up by an individual. The mistake supposed could not have been committed, unless the inscription had been read; and no one who had read the inscription could commit the mistake. It is, therefore, unnecessary to observe further, that the stone on which the inscription is found is so small, that it could have served only for the support of a statue below the size of life. But the statues set up by public authority were either of the size

* Gruteri Thesaurus Inscriptionum, Tom. i. p. xcvi. n. 5.

of life or colossal. Beside, if Simon had been enrolled among the gods by a public act, a temple, an altar and priests would have been dedicated to his service. And of all these particulars Justin cannot reasonably be supposed to have been ignorant. One of two things, therefore, appears evident. Either the statue of Semo Sancus was not the statue referred to by Justin; or Justin did not mean to assert, that the statue of which he spoke was erected by public authority. One position or the other, it would seem, must be abandoned.

Let it be supposed, then, that Justin did not believe the statue of which he spoke to have been erected by public authority. In this case, if it be said that he mistook the inscription to Sancus for one to Simon, the first improbability that strikes us, and it may seem sufficient to settle the question, is the improbability that he, or any one else, should have read so carelessly, as to think that the words *Semoni Sanco Deo* with *Fidio* following *Deo*, in immediate connection with it, were the words *Simoni Deo Sancto* without *Fidio* following, which could not be connected with them, as being a name appropriate to Sancus.

The unlikelihood of this mistake is aggravated by the circumstance, that three other inscriptions to Sancus have been found,* and that probably there were still more at Rome; for he was an ancient and well-known god, to whom, as we learn from Ovid, a temple was dedicated in that city on the Quirinal hill.† He is mentioned not only by Ovid, but by Livy,‡ the elder Pliny,§ and other Latin writers, and by Dionysius of Halicarnassus,|| and Plutarch.¶ If, therefore, we suppose, that Justin, out of the number of inscriptions to Sancus, mistook one for an inscription to Simon Magus, we are compelled to ascribe to him a degree of ignorance, which the circumstances of his life, his character and writings render all but incredible. We must also suppose, that his Apology, a writing in which the whole body of Christians was interested, was seen, before its presentation, by no friend capable of correcting his error.

But the previous improbability, that Justin would commit the mistake supposed, is not the only reason for believing that he did not

* They are given by Gruter, in connection with that before quoted.

† Ovidii Fast. Lib. vi. vv. 213-218.

‡ Hist. Lib. viii. c. 20. Lib. xxxii. c. 1.

§ Hist. Nat. Lib. viii. c. 74.

|| Antiq. Roman. Lib. ii. § 49. p. 109. Lib. iv. § 58. p. 246. Ed. Hudson.

¶ Questiones Romanæ, n. xxx.

commit it. Circumstances subsequent to the presentation of his Apology afford proof equally strong. Justin's supposed mistake has been called a "gross" and "ridiculous" blunder. Epithets at least as harsh must have been applied to it in his own day by the opponents of his faith, and by his personal enemies, through whose hatred, at a subsequent period, he was expecting to be summoned, as he shortly after was summoned, to martyrdom.* It would be idle to suppose that his Apology was not read by them. The Christians were a spreading, obnoxious, and persecuted sect. They had become an object of attention to the Emperors. They were looked upon by the generality with religious horror and aversion. They were the most extraordinary class of men in the Empire, distinguished from all others by very remarkable characteristics. And the Apology of Justin, formally presented to the Emperor and the Senate, was a public protest by one of the most eminent of their number, probably with the concurrence of many others, against the feelings with which they were regarded, and the manner in which they had been treated. It claimed to be an exposition and vindication of their doctrines and morals. It is impossible to doubt, that such a composition must have been read by many who would read it with no friendly feelings. But in this work Justin put forward in a most conspicuous manner, as we have seen, his allegation of the fact, that a statue dedicated to Simon, as a god, existed in a particular place at Rome. He earnestly solicited attention to his notice of it. Had he committed the extraordinary blunder supposed, it would have been immediately seized upon as an object of ridicule, and employed to destroy the effect of all else he had said. It would have been exposed and scouted as soon as it appeared. The mention of the statue would have been omitted in all subsequent copies of his Apology; and neither Justin himself, nor any Christian writer following him, would have referred to it; except, perhaps, to apologize for the error.

But there is not the least trace, that the account of Justin was either ridiculed or questioned in ancient times. Some years after the publication of his Apology, Justin was so little aware of having exposed himself to derision, that he referred to the passages relating to Simon, only with self-gratulation, as evidence of his own fearlessness in the cause of Christianity, since he had not been restrained from writing them through dread of the followers of Simon among his own

* II. Apologia, p. 120.

countrymen, the Samaritans.* Half a century after Justin wrote, Tertullian, in another defence of Christians, distinguished by its vigor of thought and expression, took notice of the fact which his predecessor had brought forward. He says, addressing the Heathens with contemptuous irony ; “ Your ancient gods may be pleased with your deifying your emperors, and congratulate themselves upon having their masters made their equals. But when you adore Laurentina, a public prostitute, (would at least that it were Lais or Phryne !) together with Juno, Ceres and Diana ; when you consecrate Simon Magus with a statue and an inscription, ‘ To a holy god ; ’ when you enrol some unknown boy of the court† in the divine synod, though the old gods were not of a nobler race, yet they may think themselves treated with indignity by you in admitting others to those honors, which they alone had anciently received.”‡ It would be an absurdity to imagine that Tertullian was here guilty of exposing himself to scorn by repeating as a falsehood, what, when first uttered as a blunder, had brought shame on his predecessor and the Christian community. If he did not speak of the existence of the statue to Simon from his personal knowledge, which he well may have done, yet it is clear that he had never heard that the account of its existence had been exploded.

The account of Justin is quoted at length by Eusebius § without any expression of distrust ; and the statue to Simon is, as I have said, referred to by Christian writers for more than two centuries, the last, whom it is worth while to mention, being Theodoret. || We find in some of them the error, as I doubt not it is, of ascribing its erection to the Emperor Claudius, as his proper act. In the fifth century the story was told with some variations. An addition, probable enough in itself, but for which, perhaps, there was no sufficient authority, is made by Theodoret, who says that the statue was of brass ; and Augustine, whose correctness in the statement of facts is, in general, not to be trusted, speaks of a statue at Rome to Helena in connection with that to Simon ; ¶ an error probably founded on the account of Irenæus, that the Simonians worshipped statues both of Simon and Helena. We do not know that any of these writers were eyewitnesses to the existence

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 397.

† Apologet. c. 13. p. 14.

|| Hæret. Fab. Lib. i. n. 1. Opp. iv. 191, 192.

¶ Catalog. Hæres. Opp. vi. 14.

† The reference is to Antinous.

§ Hist. Eccles. Lib. ii. c. 13.

of the statue. We do not know how long after the time of Justin it remained standing. But neither their want of personal knowledge, nor their variations nor mistakes in speaking of the statue, have any bearing on the argument for which their mention of it is adduced. This argument is, that a series of Christian writers would not have continued to repeat a story founded on a gross blunder, which they could not but know had afforded, and, whenever repeated, must continue to afford, occasion of triumph to their heathen opponents.

It would seem, then, that the solution of Justin's imagined error, by the supposition that he mistook a statue of Semo Sancus for one of Simon Magus, can hardly be admitted as plausible; and it further appears, that there must be some very great intrinsic objection to his account, to balance the weighty improbabilities connected with the supposition of its not being true. I speak of his account of the existence of the statue. He may have been misunderstood, or he may have been in error, about the circumstances attending its erection. Whatever mistake he, or any other writer, may have committed in this respect may be easily paralleled. But, considering all the circumstances of the case, it would be hard to parallel the supposed mistake concerning its existence.

In regard to the fact of its existence, with which alone we are concerned, there is no difficulty in believing it to have been erected by some of Simon's followers at Rome. They worshipped in private, statues of Simon and Helena. Nothing appears to render it improbable, that they might have obtained leave, if that, as I suppose, were necessary, to set up a statue to him at Rome exposed to public view. The deification of contemporaries after death was common in that age, so that, as Juvenal says, the increased number of the gods overburdened unhappy Atlas with their weight.* The examples of it in the apotheoses of the Roman emperors, and of those to whom they extended the honor, are familiar to every one. There is a more affecting illustration of the common conceptions respecting it in the intention of Cicero to deify his beloved daughter Tullia, and to erect a temple to her memory.† We have already observed a case parallel to the public deifi-

* Sat. xiii. vv. 46-49.

† See his letters relating to the subject in the 12th book of his Letters to Atticus, and the fragment of his treatise *de Consolatione*, preserved by Lactantius, Institut. Lib. i. § 15.

cation of Simon by his followers, in the divine honors paid by the Cephallenians to Epiphanes.* Similar honors are said to have been rendered at Parium, to Alexander the Paphlagonian, and to Peregrinus Proteus, impostors of the same class with Simon; and at Troas to a certain Neryllinus, of whom we know nothing except that he was probably of like character.† The more noted charlatan, Apollonius of Tyana, was also regarded as a god, and thought worthy of having temples built for his worship.‡ But it may seem unnecessary to adduce these facts, since there is no reasonable question, that Simon was adored as a god, or as God, by his followers, and therefore no reason to doubt that they might have erected a statue to him with the inscription reported.

It would seem, then, that there is nothing intrinsically improbable in the statement of Justin respecting the existence of the statue to Simon, and that the discovery of the inscription to Semo Sancus does not serve to invalidate it; but that, on the other hand, the gravest improbabilities attend the supposition that his statement is not true.

But, if this be so, a question arises, well deserving consideration, how it has happened that Justin's statement, confirmed by a series of subsequent writers, has been rejected almost unanimously, and often contemptuously, by Protestant scholars.

The immediate occasion of its being thus rejected has undoubtedly been, the confounding together of Justin's testimony to the existence of the statue with his account of the circumstances attending its erection, and the mistake (as it seems to be), that this account implies that Simon was deified, and honored with a statue, by the Emperor and Senate;—not with their permission, but by an act originating from them. But, as we have seen, Justin's history of its erection, and his testimony to its existence, are two things entirely distinct; so that concerning the former, he may have been altogether in error, while as respects the latter, a mistake appears hardly credible.

The ultimate cause, then, of what may seem the hasty and indiscri-

* See before, p. 118.

† Athenagoræ Legat. pro Christ. § 26. p. 304. Ed. Marani.

‡ Philostratus de Vita Apollonii. Lib. i. c. 5. p. 6. Lib. viii. c. 29. p. 369. Ed. Olearii.—Dion. Cass. Hist. Roman. in Caracalla. Lib. lxxvii. § 18. p. 1304. Ed. Reimari.—Vopiscus in Aurelian. c. 24.

minate manner in which his whole account has been rejected, is, perhaps, to be found in the prejudices and unjust judgments that have existed concerning the fathers. Under this common name have been comprehended Christian writers who lived during five centuries,* men the most diverse from each other in intellect, learning, and morals, of contrary opinions, and placed in circumstances the most unlike; some of them eminent for the highest and most difficult virtues; some propelled to gross errors of speculation and conduct by the misdirected force of religious principle in combination with their temper and passions; and some deformed by vices,—bigotry, hypocrisy, falsehood, a spirit of persecution, and greediness for power. But, in consequence of their all bearing the same name, which simply denotes them as ancient Christian writers on religious faith and practice, they have been regarded as forming a class of men so distinguished by essential characteristics, in which they resembled each other, that they all approximated to a common standard of morals, intellect, and belief. Hence the incapacity, ignorance, errors, and vices of individuals, have been brought forward, directly or indirectly, as chargeable on all those who shared with them the same generic name, or, in other words, were uninspired Christian writers during the first six centuries. It would be as reasonable to class the heathen philosophers together as a body having a common character, and to make Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, responsible for the morals of Aristippus, the reasonings of Pyrrho, the brutalities of the Cynics, or the gross vices by which so many others of their number were disgraced.

The tendency to depreciate the fathers commenced with the Reformation. Regarding them as a common body, the Romish church found in their writings, that is, in some of their writings, a support for its errors. It appealed to their authority; and this authority, with little discrimination between one writer and another, the Protestants were disposed to invalidate. The tendency among Protestants to form a low estimate of the fathers was further strengthened by the fact, that the peculiar doctrines of Luther and Calvin, and their followers, respecting the moral nature of man and the agency of God, were in strong opposition to those of the more respectable and able Christian writers of antiquity, and, in fact, to the general doctrine of Christians

* From the second to the sixth. The name is often still further extended to comprehend Christian writers till the twelfth century.

before the time of Augustine. Such being the state of feeling among the Protestants, it is also to be remarked, that the fathers of the first three centuries, the *earlier* fathers, as I have called them, those incomparably of the most interest from their circumstances and from their character, were regarded with but little favor by the Romish church, as affording little or no countenance to its abuses. Tertullian and Origen were not among its saints; nor was another writer deserving to be classed with them, Lactantius; and with regard to others, the most eminent of those times, as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, it is contended by the scholars of that church, that much in their writings is to be excused only by a consideration of the crude and yet unformed conceptions of religious doctrines which existed in their time.*

The credit of the fathers was shaken by the Reformation. But other causes have since powerfully operated to produce in many a feel-

* The very false judgment which has prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church concerning the relative worth of the *earlier* and *later* fathers, of those who lived before and those who lived after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, cannot, perhaps, be better illustrated than by a few words of one of the most learned, intelligent, and liberal-minded of its theologians, Du Pin. In his "Bibliothèque des Auteurs Ecclésiastiques," when he comes to treat of those of the fourth century, he says (in his "Avertissement au Lecteur"); "It is not necessary here to speak in praise of the Ecclesiastical Authors of the fourth century. The public is sufficiently prepossessed in their favor. Their names are more known than those of the Authors of the first three centuries, and their reputation better established. They are held in greater esteem; and a higher idea is entertained of their knowledge and their merit. It must in truth be confessed, that, as the Church was never more flourishing than in this century, so it never had more illustrious, more able, and more eloquent writers."

On the contrary, the more eminent writers of the first three centuries, whom (with the exception of Lactantius) I have so often had occasion to mention, are of great interest, because in their works we may trace the developement of our religion in the hearts and lives of men whom it had withdrawn from the Pagan world. The works of those of after times are to be read principally to trace the developement of its corruptions. But it is not strange, that a church which has embodied and sanctified those corruptions should prefer the latter to the former.

The eloquence of the heart and the intellect is to be found in the earlier fathers, the eloquence of men of uncommon minds and strong feelings, struggling in a cause for which they were prepared to suffer and to die. There is no eloquence of the fathers of later date to be compared with that of Tertullian or Lactantius. There is none of their number who rivalled Clement of Alexandria in learning; and still less is there any one who presents a character so blameless and estimable as that of Origen.

ing of indiscriminate disrespect towards them. Many of the errors respecting Christianity that existed before the Reformation remained among Protestants. These errors were traditionary. They were to be found, or their rudiments at least were to be found in ancient times, in the theology of some of the fathers, particularly the later fathers. It followed, therefore, when the attention of Protestants was more directed to the controversies among themselves, than to the contest with the Romish church, that the defenders of those errors appealed to the fathers anew, and again asserted their authority. They were brought forward as expounders of religion entitled to the highest deference; and, with all the ignorance and all the intellectual defects that belonged to them, as belonging to their age, they were opposed to the learning and acuteness of the most enlightened of modern times. Hence the attention of some of the ablest scholars was directed particularly to their errors and defects, as affording proof that they had no claim to the deference which was so injudiciously demanded for them. The want of wisdom which had placed them in so disadvantageous a position was exposed by showing how ill qualified they were to occupy it. A prejudice was thus raised against the ancient Christian writers as a body; and great injustice has been done to the fathers generally, but especially to the earlier and more excellent of their number. Being ancients they have been estimated as if they were contemporaries. They have been exhibited in relations altogether different from those in which they actually stood, and placed under a point of view from which they ought never to have been regarded. In consequence, their character and writings have been directly, as well as indirectly, misrepresented. The prejudice against them has been readily adopted by the superficial and ignorant, who are ever disposed to triumph over the great men of other times on account of their wanting the knowledge and the intellectual advantages belonging to the age in which they themselves live. To the fate of the early Christian writers of real eminence for their talents and virtues, we may find a parallel in that of Aristotle, who was, perhaps, the most penetrating and profound of Grecian philosophers, but whose foolish admirers opposed his authority to the progress of science, till his name almost became a by-word of ridicule.

If, then, the view we have taken of the accounts of Justin, and of

other fathers, respecting the statue of Simon Magus be correct, the unqualified rejection of them by a great majority of Protestant scholars may, perhaps, be ascribed mainly to the operation of that prejudice of which I have spoken ; and, if so, it affords a remarkable exemplification of it.

NOTE B.

(See pp. 41, 149.)

ON THE CLEMENTINE HOMILIES.

THE fictitious narrative contained in the Clementine Homilies* exists in two principal forms, one of which bears that title, and the other is called the Recognitions of Clement. The title of the Recognition of Clement (in the singular)† seems anciently to have been common to both. They have been published by Cotelier in his edition of the *Patres Apostolici* from a single manuscript, in which the latter part of the work is wanting. There are three different abridgments of the Homilies extant in manuscript, of which Cotelier has published one. The Recognitions have come down to us only in a Latin translation by Rufinus,‡ who, generally an unfaithful translator, professes, in regard to this particular book, to have omitted certain passages “concerning the unoriginated God and the originated (de ingenito Deo genitoque),§ and some other topics; as these passages, to say nothing more of them, surpassed his comprehension.” Rufinus mentions that there were two editions of the work of Clement, in some respects different from each other, but giving in great part the same narrative. He refers, probably, to the Homilies and the Recognitions.

* I do not think it worth while to change the modern title, but the Greek word ‘Ομιλίας should have been rendered “Discourses.” It refers to the conversations and discussions with which the work is filled.

† ‘Ο ‘Αναγνωρισμὸς Κλήμεντος. The title of “The Circuits of Peter,” *Αἱ Περίοδοι Πέτρου*, appears also to have been used concerning both forms of the narrative.

‡ This translation was made about the end of the fourth century.

§ The passage, or one of the passages, relating to this subject, is preserved in some manuscripts as rendered by another translator, and is comprised in ten sections of the third book, as published by Gotelier, namely, from the second to the eleventh, inclusive.

Both these works contain a fictitious narrative, the hero of which relates his own history. He represents himself as a young man, a citizen of Rome, by the name of Clement. His mind, he tells us, had been long occupied and distressed by inquiries and doubts on the subject of religion. Whilst in this state, he hears at Rome of the promulgation of Christianity. He seeks out the apostle Peter, and becomes his associate and convert. During his intercourse with Peter, he informs him, that he was of a noble family, but that he had been separated in his childhood first from his mother and his two elder brothers, and afterwards from his father. Of his father, who had left him for the purpose of seeking his mother and brothers, he had not heard for twenty years. But during his travels with Peter he meets and recognises all his lost relatives. Hence the narrative was called the Recognition of Clement. A considerable part of each work is occupied by accounts of Simon Magus, who is supposed to have been, at the time of the story, the great opponent of Peter, and by the detail of public disputations, in which Peter and his disciples are represented as having contended against him. In the Homilies, Simon appears much more than in the Recognitions. The doctrines ascribed to him are, in great part, Gnostic doctrines. The discussion of them, therefore, throws some light on the opinions and reasoning of the Gnostics, and renders the work of a certain degree of value in studying their history.

Upon comparing the two works together, it becomes evident, I think, that the Recognitions are founded on, and are merely a re-fashioning of, the Homilies. The Homilies are a remarkable work, distinguished for freedom of speculation, and for the variety of opinions which the author brings forward, either to maintain or to confute. It is true, that his own opinions are often extravagant, and that in speculating freely he commonly speculates falsely, and discovers no remarkable ability in reasoning, even according to the standard of his age. But the activity of his mind, the occasional justness of his views, his command of language, and the extent of his information, show a somewhat cultivated understanding, engaged in philosophical studies. The work is the most curious exemplification that remains of what we may suppose to have been the effect of an imperfect acquaintance with Christianity on some thinking and discursive minds, in an early stage of its history. It gives a view of the excitement of thought, and of the

mixture of truth and error, that might be expected in such minds, and of their freedom from some false opinions, which afterwards became connected with our religion.

But, with the exception of the story, the striking characteristics of the Homilies disappear in the Recognitions. Large portions of the narrative are given almost verbally, and its outline is preserved with some variations. But the discourses of Peter, of Simon, and of others, which constitute the greater part of the work, are changed. Common-place matter, more conformed, we may suppose, to the opinions of the age when the Recognitions appeared, is substituted for what was doubtless regarded as the hazardous and erroneous teaching of the original author. In the discourses, however, given in the Recognitions, many suggestions and thoughts are borrowed from the Homilies, though often with a change of their original place and relation. The general impression from a comparison of the two works is, that, the Homilies being attractive from the narrative which they contained, as well as from their other characteristics, it was the design of the author of the Recognitions to supersede that work by introducing another, having the same narrative, intermixed in the same manner with various discourses, but free from at least the more obnoxious speculations of its predecessor. The design of the Abridgment of the Homilies, published by Cotelier, appears to have been similar; but in this little more than the original story is given, the discourses being omitted without much attempt to supply their place. This, or some other abridgment, seems in later times to have come into use, and to have been regarded with favor, being probably the work referred to by the unknown author of a tract called "A Synopsis of Sacred Scripture" * (of uncertain date), who says, as I understand him, that "what is true and important" in what he calls "The Circuits of Peter," that is, the Clementine Homilies, "has been selected from them and digested," and that this selection may be read; † and by the ecclesiastical historian, Nicephorus Callisti, in the fifteenth century, who speaks of what were in his day called "The Clementines" as well received by the Church. ‡

Among other doctrines different from those which prevailed before the close of the second century, the author of the Homilies teaches, by

* Published with the works of Athanasius.

† Athanasii Opp. ii. 202. Ed. Montfaucon.

‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. iii. c. 18.—as quoted by Cotelier.

putting his words into the mouth of Peter, that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, and represents it as containing a great mixture of dangerous errors, especially false representations of God, the insertion of which is ascribed to Satan, during the period when the Law was preserved by tradition.* He believes this corruption of Scripture to have been permitted for the trial of men, and expresses himself concerning this subject with scarcely coherent extravagance. It was intended, according to him, to make evident the distinction between two classes of men; those, on the one hand, "who have the hardihood to lend a willing ear to what is written against God," and those, on the other, "who, through affection for him, not only disbelieve what is said against him, but would not even endure to listen to it, if it were true, esteeming it much safer to expose themselves to danger for a faith that honors him, than to live with an ill conscience through faith in blasphemous words."† In conformity with this, he denies the truth of the fall of Adam, of the drunkenness of Noah, and of the polygamy of Abraham and Jacob. He says, that Moses was not a homicide, and did not learn how to judge the Israelites from the priest of an idol.‡ He maintains, that Adam was a manifestation of Christ, affirming him to be the True Prophet ("the True Prophet" being the title by which he commonly designates Christ); and thinks that one is not to be pardoned, even if, deceived by "spurious scripture," he should believe ill of the progenitor of all men.§ So far is he from regarding the ritual law of the Jews as of divine origin, that he speaks with abhorrence of sacrifices, and expressly teaches, that they never had been acceptable to God. || He seems to have had a bad opinion of Aaron, the Jewish prophets, and John the Baptist.¶ But, according to him, the teaching of Moses and Christ was the same; and the believer in either alone, if he kept God's laws, would

* Homil. ii. § 38. See also the remainder of the second, and the third Homily, particularly Homil. iii. § 47; and Homil. xviii. §§ 19-22.

† Homil. ii. § 38. Conf. Homil. iii. § 10.

‡ Homil. ii. § 52.—The author, in speaking of Moses, refers to the story of his killing an Egyptian, Exodus ii. 11, seqq.; and to that of his adopting the counsel of his father-in-law, Jethro, a priest of Midian, concerning judging the Israelites, Exod. xviii.

§ Homil. iii. §§ 17-21.

|| Homil. iii. § 45. Conf. § 26.

¶ Homil. ii. §§ 15-17. § 23. Homil. iii. §§ 11-28.

be equally accepted by God ; faith in either being required only as the ground of such obedience. *

His abhorrence of sacrifices, it may be observed, was connected with an equal abhorrence of the use of animal food. Giving a fabulous account of the introduction of the latter by the giants before the flood, he says, that when brutes failed, men proceeded to eat human flesh ; nor was it, he adds, a wide step, to devour the flesh of their own kind, after having tasted that of other animals.† This, and whatever else I have represented him as saying, it is to be recollected, that he says under the person of St. Peter.

What may next be remarked is, that the author appears to have had no design of representing his work as written by the Apostolical Father, Clement of Rome. It is a fictitious autobiography, in which the name of Clement is given to the supposed writer, who is also described as a native of Rome. He might, therefore, be called Clement of Rome ; and this coincidence alone seems to have given occasion, in the fourth century, to the belief, that the author was the Apostolical Father ; a belief, which involved the absurdity of supposing, that an evident fiction was true history.‡ But the work itself does not claim to be his production, and, in fact, affords no reasonable ground for the mistake ; and is, therefore, not to be regarded as supposititious. Its true author is wholly unknown. It has been conjectured that he was a Jewish Christian. But he does not discover the narrow prejudices which characterized the generality of the Ebionites, nor do his doctrines, feelings, use of language, or general cast of mind, appear to mark him as a Jewish Christian of more liberal views. A Jewish author would hardly have written under the assumed character of a Gentile, as Clement is represented to have been.§ Perhaps the most probable supposition is, that the author

* Homil. viii. §§ 5-7.

† Ibid. § 16.

‡ This error appears to have led to, and to have been afterwards countenanced by, the fabrication of an epistle, professedly from the supposed author, Clement, to St. James at Jerusalem, which is now prefixed to the work. In this epistle Clement is made to speak of himself, as having been ordained Bishop of Rome by Peter, and thus to identify himself with the Apostolical Father. But there can be little question, that this epistle is not the work of the author of the Homilies.

§ The principal ground on which the writer of the Clementine Homilies has, in modern times, been regarded as a Jewish Christian, and particularly as an Ebionite, may be thus stated. Before Epiphanius, as I have already had occasion to

was a Gentile convert, a philosopher, who had been impressed by the intrinsic worth of Christianity, but who was very imperfectly informed

remark, the heretical Jewish Christians had in common been denominated by the name of Ebionites alone. But he divides them into two principal classes, the Nazarenes and the Ebionites (Hæres. xxix. xxx.). He then distinguishes between the earlier and the later Ebionites (Hæres. xxx. Opp. i. 127, 141, 162); and to the later Ebionites, as I suppose he must be understood, so far as he had any distinct meaning, he ascribes opinions respecting the Jewish Law, its sacrifices, the Jewish prophets, the manifestation of Christ in Adam and in others, the duty of abstinence from animal food, and the absence of any merit in celibacy, similar to those of the author of the Homilies. He says, likewise (p. 139), that the Ebionites used "The Circuits of Peter" (*Αἱ Περίοδοι Πέτρου*), the authorship of which he attributes to the Apostolical Father, Clement of Rome, but that they had so corrupted the book as to leave little in it that was true; for that the doctrine of Clement was in fact wholly contrary to their opinions. There can be little doubt, that the book which he refers to was the Homilies, essentially uncorrupted. Hence it has been concluded, that the author of the Homilies was a Jewish Christian of the class of the Ebionites, according to the nomenclature of Epiphanius.

But the account given by Epiphanius of the Ebionites bears his usual characteristics of folly, inconsistency, and evident want of truth. Probably the sect existed in his day only in some inconsiderable remains of it. His materials for an account of it were apparently scanty; and he has made up a great part of his article by a digression, consisting of fabulous stories concerning real or pretended converts from Judaism to orthodoxy. His assertion, that the doctrines contained in the Clementine Homilies were held by a portion of the Jewish Christians, is confirmed by no credible writer. Nothing like it is said by the earlier fathers, contemporary with the Ebionites, when the Ebionites were more numerous; and the fact is in itself very improbable. His account of the Ebionites should be read in connection with his accounts of the Nasaræans (Hæres. xviii.), and of the Ossenes (Hæres. xix.), both Jewish sects, as he pretends, which existed before the coming of Christ (p. 31), and likewise of the Sampsæans or Elcesæans (Hæres. liii.), of all which sects he represents an individual of the name of Elxai as the founder, or reformer, or chief teacher (pp. 40, 43, 127, 461). The whole taken together presents such a mass of assertions, for which he could have had no authority, of gross improbabilities, inconsistencies, and evident fictions, as to show that no credit is to be attached to any statement respecting the Ebionites, which rests solely on his authority. As I have mentioned, he has been supposed to ascribe to them the use of the Clementine Homilies. But the Homilies are a long work written in Greek; and from much which he says of the Ebionites (pp. 127, 130, 137), the obvious inference (an inference confirmed by better authority) is, that the generality of them used no books, at least no books of a religious kind, but such as were in the Hebrew language. His purpose in ascribing the doctrines of the Homilies, and the use of this book, to an heretical Jewish sect, may, not impro-

respecting its early history, being probably unacquainted with any book of the New Testament, except the Gospels.

The Homilies are, I conceive, of no authority to determine the real or professed opinions of Simon Magus. What is related of his life and magical deeds is evidently fabulous; and on this ground alone we might well distrust the representation of his doctrines. Simon is merely introduced as an historical personage into a work of fiction. He is exhibited according to the common conception of him, as a magician, and an enemy of Christianity; but all the detail concerning his discourses and actions is evidently imaginary. Taking advantage of the popular

bably, have been to bring the work into disrepute; for it appears to have had a degree of reputation and celebrity even in the fourth century, notwithstanding its heterodoxy.

It may, however, be conjectured, that before the time of Epiphanius the author of the Homilies had been called an Ebionite, as a term of reproach, by some who were offended at his doctrines; especially, perhaps, at his representing Moses and Christ as on an equality, and the ministry of one as being essentially of the same character with that of the other. In applying to him the name "Ebionite," we may suppose that they meant, that he was no better than an Ebionite. A heretic they thought him, but he evidently was not a Gnostic; and beside the Gnostics, there were no others clearly recognised as heretics in his time except the Ebionites; and with these he might be regarded as having some correspondences.

Such an application to him of the name of Ebionite may have led to the fabrication of two pieces, prefixed to the Homilies in the manuscript published by Cotelier, one purporting to be an Epistle of Peter to James, and the other called the Adjuration of James. These, unquestionably, are not the work of the author of the Homilies. They are written under the character of an Ebionite. Peter, in his Epistle, is made to exhort that the books of his preaching (the Homilies), which he sends to James, should be privately communicated only to Jewish Christians, whose characters were well ascertained; and, conformably to this, James, in his Adjuration, is represented as solemnly adjuring those to whom he delivers the work not to suffer it to pass into the hands of any unworthy person. But, whatever may have afforded a pretence for these compositions, it is not unlikely that they are an ancient bookseller's fraud, intended to give a factitious value to some copy or copies of the work, by representing it as one very difficult to be procured by Gentile Christians.

It might be inferred from some notices of the Homilies, in modern times, that the writer held the common opinion of the Jewish Christians, that Christ was only a man. But this was not the case. He regarded Christ not as God, but, under the character of the Son of God, as a divine being, the glory of whose form unclothed with flesh no man could see and live, and who alone could behold the glory of the Father. (Homil. xvii. § 16.)

notions concerning him, the writer of the Homilies, there can be little doubt, ascribed to him at pleasure certain opinions which he regarded as consistent with his character, and which it was his own purpose to confute. That his representations of the tenets of Simon are not to be relied on, appears from the license of fiction with which he ascribes his own doctrines to St. Peter. In connection with this, the writer's ignorance of opinions existing in the first century may be inferred from his extraordinary violations of chronology respecting the early history of Christianity, and from the inconsistent fictions which he has blended with it. He who is not familiar with the well-known historical facts of any period, cannot be supposed to be acquainted with the opinions connected with them; for facts are more easily learned than opinions.

The Homilies commence with a narrative, in which Clement, the fictitious author, relates, that while he was in perplexity and distress concerning religion, in the reign of Tiberius, he heard a report of the preaching of Jesus, as having commenced in Judea in the spring of the year during which the report reached Rome; that some one, the same year, publicly announced the divine mission of Christ in that city; that in consequence he determined to sail for Judæa, but was driven by contrary winds to Alexandria; that here he found Barnabas, who was preaching Christ; and that, Barnabas leaving Alexandria, he himself sailed for Cæsarea, where Peter was then preaching, with whom his intimacy immediately commenced.* All these are related as events of the year when Christ began to preach. But, after several other anachronisms, we find Peter, among his first discourses, a few days after the arrival of Clement, speaking of the prophecy of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem as already confirmed by the event.† The story throughout belongs to a period much later than the date given at its commencement. These errors, it may be said, are only proofs of strange inadvertence, and cannot be ascribed to mere ignorance. But

* Homil. i. §§ 6-16.

† Homil. iii. § 15.—It may be noted, as a proof of the unskilfulness with which the Recognitions were fashioned from the Homilies, that the former work commences with a similar narrative, while, after an interval of still fewer pages, Peter is introduced as speaking of the crucifixion of Jesus, and relating what happened to the Apostles after his death. Lib. i. § 41, seqq. Comp. Lib. ix. § 29. It may, at the same time, be conjectured, that the writer observed the grosser mistake of his original, for he makes Peter speak of the Jewish War as only impending over the unbelieving nation. Lib. i. § 39.

it is such inadvertence as the author could hardly have fallen into had he been familiar with the events in the early history of Christianity, even so far as they may be learned from the New Testament.

His want of any just conceptions of the events and characters of that period appears, likewise, in the fictions which he has introduced. Thus he has a strange notion, which he puts into the mouth of Peter, that God disposes things on earth in pairs; and that among men, subsequently to Adam, the first, in order of time, of each pair is evil, and the second good. John the Baptist and Christ, according to him, formed such a pair, and, in consequence, John is clearly, though somewhat indirectly, represented by him as evil.* Conformably to this, he reports, that Simon and Helena were among his disciples, and that after John's death Simon supplanted his immediate successor, Dositheus, and became the head of his school.† This representation was perhaps founded on the existence of a sect of professed disciples of John the Baptist who opposed him to Christ, a sect of which there seem to be some obscure indications in the New Testament; and of which it has been conjectured, not without probability, that the remains still exist in the East under the name of Sabians, the Sabians regarding John, and not Christ, as the chosen minister of God. In the *Recognitions*, though no impeachment is thrown on John's character, it is said, that "some very considerable persons among his disciples preached their master as the Christ."‡

It shows the very low state of criticism in the fourth century, that, notwithstanding such characteristics of the narrative, writers of much note at that period, as Rufinus,§ and Epiphanius, || ascribed its authorship to Clement, the Apostolical Father, the supposed companion and friend of St. Paul. In the next century the ecclesiastical historian, Sozomen, on the ground of this narrative, reckoned Clement as the earliest ecclesiastical historian among Christians.¶

In modern times the *Homilies* have not been much attended to.

* *Homil. ii. §§ 15-17, 23.*—This view of John's character is not admitted into the *Recognitions*, the passages of the *Homilies* just referred to being altered. Compare *Recognitions*, Book iii. §§ 55, 59, 61, and Book ii. § 8.

† *Homil. ii. §§ 23, 24.*

‡ *Lib. i. §§ 54, 60.*

§ See the preface to his *Translation of the Recognitions*, and his *Treatise on the Adulteration of Origen's Writings*.

|| *Hæres. xxx. § 15. Opp. i. 139.*

¶ *Hist. Eccles. Lib. i. c. 1.*

“These books,” says Lardner, speaking of the Homilies and the Recognitions, “may be both of some use, and may deserve a more particular examination than has been yet given them.” The discovery of the Homilies, and their first publication (which was in 1672), are comparatively of recent date. They have been too much confounded with the Recognitions, a work of a far inferior character, and of no value to one acquainted with the Homilies; and they have been erroneously, I think, regarded as a supposititious production. At the same time, they do not possess much intrinsic interest except to one who is studying the effect of the promulgation of Christianity on the state of opinion. They are however, the earliest example remaining of a fictitious narrative in prose of any considerable length, interwoven with events and interests of common life. No preceding work now extant has such resemblance to a modern novel; and the author, notwithstanding his historical errors, shows considerable talent in the management of the story, in the naturalness of the dialogue, and in the preservation of a consistent character in different individuals.

NOTE C.

(See p. 113.)

ON THE FALSE CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST THE HERETICS,
PARTICULARLY BY THE LATER FATHERS.

It is the purpose of this Note to show with what incredulity we may regard many of the charges brought against the Gnostics (the Christian Gnostics), particularly by the later fathers. This will appear,—for we may confine ourselves to a single line of argument,—by showing, that similar charges were brought by them against the Montanists, and by the Heathens against the whole body of Christians ; in both which cases we cannot hesitate to reject them as utterly unfounded.

The Montanists had their origin in the latter half of the second century, though it is not probable that they were generally considered as heretics till after its close. They were distinguished by believing in the miraculous inspiration of their founder, Montanus, and of some of his followers, particularly two women, Maximilla, and Prisca or Priscilla. Montanus they regarded as having come to reform and perfect the church, and establish its discipline. They were enthusiasts, who, in asserting his inspiration, and that of other members of their sect, fell into an error, which has often been repeated by different classes of religionists from their time to our own, and which was then particularly favored by the common belief, that miraculous powers, and among them the spirit of prophecy, or of inspired teaching, still subsisted in the Christian community. With this error, which was the main point in controversy between them and the catholic Christians, they united rigid asceticism, and peculiar severity in inflicting ecclesiastical censures for immorality. But their general views of the doctrines of Christianity did not differ from those commonly received. They were enthusiasts and reformers, who exasperated other Christians against them by charging them with laxity of principle, because they did not adopt their severe

modes of life and discipline. The character of the sect recommended it to the stern morality, the excitable feelings, and the austere temper of Tertullian, who became a member, and from whose subsequent writings is to be learned most of what may be relied on as true concerning it. There was a great difference of temperament between Tertullian and Fenelon; but the delusion of Tertullian may be compared with that of Fenelon in his connection with Madame de Guion and the Quietists. Tertullian was accustomed, after joining the Montanists, to denominate common Christians by the same term which the Gnostics applied to them, *Psychici*, the implied sense of which may be given in English by the words *not spiritual*; but, at the same time, in speaking of catholic Christians, he says; "We have communion with them in the law of peace and the name of brotherhood. One faith is common to us and them, one God, the same Christ, the same hope, the same sacrament of baptism, and, to say all in a word, we are one Church."*

Tertullian informs us, that one of the bishops of Rome (it is uncertain to whom he refers) was for a time favorably disposed towards the Montanists, and that he acknowledged or was inclined to acknowledge the proper inspiration of Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla.† Agreeing in doctrine, as the Montanists did, with other Christians, it seems to have been only by degrees that the breach was so widened, that they became a separate sect, generally considered heretical. There were, it is admitted, martyrs, they said many martyrs, from among their number.‡ Such being the character of the Montanists, let us see how they were spoken of in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Eusebius, who is followed by later writers, says, that they regarded Montanus as the Paraclete.§ This is a misrepresentation, of which the source is obvious. What they really believed was, that the Holy Spirit, or Paraclete, spoke by Montanus. He then goes on to collect various angry calumnies concerning them, without interposing a word of candour or good sense. These reports it is not worth while to repeat. We may proceed at once to the more extravagant falsehoods found in subsequent writers.

Cyril of Jerusalem (about the middle of the fourth century) speaks of Montanus "as sacrificing the miserable little children of women, and

* De Virginibus velandis, c. 2. p. 173.

† Advers. Praxeam, c. 1. p. 501.

‡ Eusebii Hist. Eccles. Lib. v. c. 16.

§ Ibid. c. 14.

cutting them up for horrible food upon the occasion of what they [the Montanists] call their mysteries.”* By “their mysteries” Cyril intends their celebration of the Lord’s Supper. “Montanus,” says Isidore of Pelusium,† “allows the use of magic, and the murder of children, and adultery, and the worship of idols.” Epiphanius affirms, that Montanus declared himself to be “the Lord God omnipotent, dwelling among men.”‡ “In this heresy,” he relates, “or in the allied heresy of the Quintillians, a horrible and detestable act is said to be performed; that upon the occasion of some festival they thrust brass pins into the whole body of an infant, and collecting the blood use it in the preparation of their sacrifice,”§—meaning the bread of the Eucharist. Epiphanius immediately proceeds to say, that he relates nothing concerning the heretics but upon good authority, lest he should appear to have no more regard to truth than the heretics themselves. After this commendation, however, of his own scrupulous veracity, he gains confidence, and affirms directly of the Quintillians, whom he represents as one branch of the Montanists, what he had before stated as a report.|| This story is repeated by Philaster,¶ and by Augustine,** being likewise given by them as a report, but without any suggestion of a doubt respecting its truth. Jerome, who, with all his great faults, had something generous in his temper, manifests a degree of proper feeling concerning it; *Malo non credere*, he says. *Sit falsum omne quod sanguinis est*; †† “I would rather not believe it. Let the whole story about blood be false.” At a still later period, Theodoret, with more good sense than any of his predecessors, simply notices the story thus: “Some spread reports concerning certain things in their mysteries; but they do not acknowledge these reports to be true; on the contrary, they say that they are calumnies.”‡‡ If other heretics had been listened to, we should doubtless have found many things in the later fathers denounced by them with equal truth as calumnies.

Thus it appears, that the series of charges against the Montanists may afford an instructive lesson to one studying the history of the here-

* Catachesis xvi. § 4. p. 227. Ed. Milles.

† De Interpret. Div. Scripturæ. Lib. i. Ep. 242. pp. 56, 57. Ed. Ritterhusii.

‡ Hæres. xlviii. § 11. p. 412.

§ Ibid. § 14. p. 416.

|| Ibid. § 15. p. 417.

¶ De Hæresibus, col. 18.

** Catal. Hæres. Opp. vi. col. 17.

†† Epist. 27. Ad Marcellam. Opp. Tom. iv. p. ii. col. 65.

‡‡ Hæret. Fab. Lib. iii. n. 2. Opp. iv. 227.

tics, of the necessity of exercising a severe judgment upon the accounts of them that have been transmitted to us; and of the amount of matter, which, especially in the writers from Eusebius downward, is to be rejected as fabulous.

But it deserves further observation, that scandals like those against the Montanists were early circulated respecting Christians in general. They particularly respected their Agapæ, or Feasts of Love, which were consecrated as a religious observance by the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "Do you believe," says Justin Martyr to Trypho, "that we eat human flesh, and after this banquet, put out the lights, and wallow in horrible lewdness?"—"As for what is commonly reported," Trypho replies, "it is not worthy of credit, for it is wholly abhorrent from human nature."* Some of the fathers of the fourth century, in writing concerning heretics, or even Justin himself on another occasion, where he will not undertake to say that such stories were not true of the heretics,† might well have remembered this reply. It is remarkable, that the charge of horrible lewdness in their pretended religious meetings was not brought against the Montanists in connection with that of eating human flesh or blood. The peculiar sternness of their discipline in respect to breaches of chastity may have prevented its obtaining currency. The calumnies against Christians generally are noticed by many other writers beside Justin. "They charge us with three crimes," says Athenagoras, "atheism, Thyestean feasts, and Œdipean debaucheries."‡ "We are affirmed to be the most wicked of men," says Tertullian, "killing and eating infants as a sacrament, and concluding with incest."§ According to Origen, there were those who pretended that Christians had been discovered in the very act of committing these crimes.|| Were it worth while, many other passages might be quoted to the same effect.

The occasion of these calumnies may be thus explained. The charge of eating human flesh, I conceive, was derived, in part, from a perverse misconception of the figurative language of the New Testament, and of the early Christians, concerning the Lord's Supper, as a participation

* Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 155, 156.

† Legatio pro Christianis, § 3. p. 282.

|| Cont. Cels. Lib. iv. § 40. Opp. i. 662.

† I. Apologia, p. 43.

§ Apologet. c. 7. p. 7.

of the body and blood of Christ. It was also probably connected with the imputation of magical arts, to which some of the heretical and pseudo-Christian sects made pretence, and which at an early period were charged upon Christians generally. Nor was this strange; for to magic, as we know, the miracles of the founder of our religion were ascribed both by its Jewish and heathen opponents; and, doubtless, so also were the miracles of the Apostles, and of his other followers by whom miracles were wrought. But in the magical rites of the Heathens, children were put to death and human sacrifices offered. Such, at least, was the popular belief;* nor is there any reason to doubt, that it was founded on fact. The name of "sacrifice" was very early given by Christians to the Eucharist; and the infant reported to be immolated in this rite, was, I suppose, imagined to be a magical sacrifice, of the flesh of which, as in the case of other offerings, the assistants partook.† The Supper was also called a "sacrament" (*sacramentum*), that is, a religious pledge or oath, and by such a sacrament of blood as was conceived of, it was probably thought that Christians bound themselves in a more direful manner to their "detestable superstition;" as it was called by Tacitus.

But the Supper was also denominated a Christian "mystery," in opposition to the Heathen mysteries. During the ages of persecution, it was often celebrated secretly, in the night, in private houses. It does not appear, that before the third century Christians had any public buildings, or proper churches, for their religious meetings. Thus originated the other part of the charge respecting debauchery; for, in their own mysteries, under similar circumstances, the more depraved of the Heathens practised the grossest impurities,—impurities on which Juvenal exhausts all the loathsome coarseness and strength of his invective.

* Thus Lucan says, in his description of the Thessalian witch Erichtho (Lib. vi. v. 550, seqq.);

"Nec refugit cædes, vivum si sacra cruorem,
Extaque funeres poscunt trepidantia mensæ.
Vulnere sic ventris, non quâ Natura vocabat,
Extrahitur partus, calidis ponendus in aris.
Et quoties sævis opus est, ac fortibus umbris,
Ipsa facit manes: hominum mors omnis in usu est."

† In treating of magic, the elder Pliny says; "Nec satis æstimari potest, quantum Romanis debeatur, qui sustulere monstra, in quibus hominem occidere religiosissimum erat, mandi vero etiam saluberrimum." Hist. Nat. Lib. xxx. c. 4.

tive. The heathen enemies of Christianity, therefore, readily believed that the Christians practised in *their* mysteries abominations like those which they knew to be common in their own.

These calumnies against Christians, or calumnies equally outrageous, were believed by the most enlightened among the Heathens; for they were believed by Tacitus. Hence, he speaks of Christianity as “a detestable superstition, which having been repressed through the punishment of its author by the Procurator, Pontius Pilate, again broke out and spread through Judæa, where the evil had its origin, and thence through Rome, where all atrocious and shameful things flow together and find favor.” The Christians, he says, were “detested for their infamous vices.” They were charged by Nero with having set fire to the city. Of this crime they were not convicted, but “of hatred to the human race.” Thus convicted, “a great multitude,” as he relates, were put to death by horrible tortures. Sport was made of their agonies, *pereuntibus addita ludibria*, “as they were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts, and baited by dogs; or nailed to crosses; or burnt to serve as lanterns by night.” The gardens of Nero were thrown open to entertain the populace with the spectacle of their sufferings; and mock Circensian games were there celebrated, the Emperor playing the part of a charioteer;—while supplications and ceremonies were going on, in the city, to propitiate the gods. In relating the frightful cruelties inflicted by Nero on the Christians, the humanity and moral sense of Tacitus appear to have deserted him. He says; “Compassion was excited,—though they were guilty, and deserved to be made examples of the severest punishment, *et novissima exempla meritos*,—because it seemed that they were destroyed not for the public good, but through the savageness of an individual.”*

* Annal. Lib. xv. c. 44.—Gibbon (Ch. xvi. Vol. ii. p. 404, seqq.) has given a translation of this passage, in a style very unlike that of Tacitus, and then endeavoured to draw away attention from it by a series of trifling and irrelevant remarks, which, if it were not for their evident purpose, might seem only to indicate a want of judgment and feeling in the writer. Among these remarks there are none with which we are concerned, except two contradictory suggestions. One of them is, that the cause which directed the cruelty of Nero against the Christians was their being confounded (that is to say, their being confounded by Nero) with the fierce zealots among the Jews, the followers of Judas the Gaulonite (or Galilæan), who, as well as the Christians, were called Galilæans. After stating this conjecture,

It is difficult to form a correct estimate of the moral worth of those who have lived in remote ages, under circumstances very unlike our own. We are apt to pass a severe judgment (not certainly without some reason), on those of the later fathers, who were very ready to admit and propagate calumnies against the heretics. But I know of nothing in their writings so dark and atrocious as this passage from Tacitus. They have nowhere, I think, described the terrible sufferings of men, whom they might have ascertained to be innocent, and affirmed that they deserved to suffer. Yet this passage was written by one whose extraordinary intellect has stamped an imperishable value on that portion of his works which has survived the deluge of the dark ages, and who, in his high moral sense, appears to have had no superior among his heathen contemporaries.

Had the Christians been destroyed by persecution, and had their books perished, if we may be allowed to make such suppositions, we

Gibbon proceeds to his next suggestion, *as an inference from it*. "How natural was it," he says, "for Tacitus, in the time of Hadrian, to appropriate to the Christians the guilt and sufferings, which he might, with far greater truth and justice, have attributed to a sect whose odious memory was almost extinguished!" The meaning of which is, that it was a natural error for Tacitus to report of the Christians what was true, not of them, but of the Jewish sect or party of the Galilæans. According to this double hypothesis, Nero persecuted the Christians by mistake for those Galilæans, the followers of Judas the Gaulonite; and Tacitus was mistaken in supposing that the Christians were persecuted, since it was not they who suffered, but the followers of Judas.

But though the Christians were called Galilæans, the followers of Judas were not called Christians; and Tacitus and Suetonius relate that it was the Christians, the followers of Christ (as the former expressly says), who endured such dreadful sufferings from the cruelty of Nero. Nor was Tacitus ignorant of the existence of the Christians of his own time, whom, while he was writing his Annals, his friend Pliny was torturing and condemning to death, though he could "find nothing against them but their bad and excessive superstition" (*nihil aliud inveni quàm superstitionem pravam et immodicam*). Against the Christians of his own time, whose characters he might have known, Tacitus, no bigot, certainly, to the religion of his ancestors, contributed to inflame the popular enmity, by giving the sanction of his great name to the most cruel calumnies. To a philosopher the subject may suggest other trains of thought and feeling than those which occurred to Gibbon; and among them, while he is contemplating such error in such a man as Tacitus, may be a deep sense of the fallibility of our nature, even in the wisest.

could have had no particular reason for rejecting the description given of them by Tacitus, false as it now appears. Few ancient writers, on the ground of personal character, can put forward higher claims to credit. We might thus have been led into the grossest error; and hence we have another lesson to teach us, with what distrust and scrutiny it is proper for us to examine the accounts, which, in ancient times, either Christian or heathen writers have given of those against whom their prejudices were excited. In modern times both the writer and the reader may have far wider means of information, and the writer may be far more restrained by the dread of open contradiction and confutation, if not by any better motive.

But another more general reflection forces itself on the mind. One cannot help considering what reliance may be placed on the representations of an ancient author, when they cannot be, or when they are not, confronted with other accounts, or compared with known facts, or viewed in relation to his character, circumstances, and purpose, or tried by their intrinsic probability. The passage from Tacitus shows us, that we may find statements made with the greatest confidence by a writer of high authority, which are wholly at variance with the truth.

NOTE D.

(See p. 169.)

ON THE JEWISH DISPENSATION, THE PENTATEUCH, AND
THE OTHER BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

SECTION I.

Preliminary Remarks.

IN the Chapter treating of the opinions of the Gnostics, and of the early catholic Christians, respecting the Jewish dispensation and the Old Testament, the difficulties attending the subject are brought into view. But it would have been out of place there to present a solution of them, accompanied with the explanations required. To do this is the purpose of the present Note. We have seen how the Old Testament was regarded by the early Christians, the catholic Christians as well as the heretics. How it should be regarded is a question of much interest.

Such is the connection between Christianity and the Jewish religion, that the divine origin of the former implies the divine origin of the latter. Christianity, if I may so speak, has made itself responsible for the fact, that the Jewish religion, like itself, proceeded immediately from God. But Christianity has not made itself responsible for the genuineness, the authenticity, or the moral and religious teachings, of that collection of books by Jewish writers, which constitutes the Old Testament. Taken collectively, it may appear, on the one hand, that those books possess a high and very peculiar character, which affords strong evidence of the divine origin of the Jewish religion; and it may appear, on the other hand, that they also contain much that is incredible, and much that does not approve itself to our understanding and moral feelings. But if the latter be the case, it is a fact with which Christianity is not concerned. Our religion is no more answerable for the genuineness, or the contents, of a series of Jewish

writings, dating from an uncertain period, and continued till after the return of a part of the nation from the Babylonish captivity, than it is responsible for the genuineness and contents of the works ascribed to Christian authors from the second century to the eleventh. The truth of our religion is no more involved in the truth of all that is related in the Books of Judges, of Kings, and of Chronicles, or in the Pentateuch, supposing the Pentateuch not to be the work of Moses, than it is in the truth of all that is related in the Ecclesiastical Histories of Eusebius, Sozomen, and Theodoret.

If these propositions be true, they go far to remove those difficulties, which not only embarrassed the early Christians, but which have continued to embarrass Christians in every age. But if they be true, a great error has been committed both by Christians and by unbelievers. The most popular and effective objections of unbelievers have been directed not against Christianity, but against the Old Testament, on the ground that Christianity is responsible for the truth, and for the moral and religious character, of all its contents; and, instead of repelling so untenable a proposition, believers have likewise assumed it; or rather they have earnestly affirmed its correctness, and proceeded to argue upon it as they could.

Thus the books composing the Old Testament have been stripped of their true character, which renders them an object of the greatest curiosity and interest; and a false character has been ascribed to them, which brings them into perpetual collision with the moral and religious conceptions of men of more enlightened times than those of their writers, with the principles of rational criticism in the interpretation of language, and even with the progress of the physical sciences. Insuperable objections to the character ascribed to them, objections such as presented themselves to the minds of the early catholic Christians and the Gnostics, lie spread over the surface of these writings. To those objections, thus obvious, familiarity may render us insensible or indifferent. We may pass over them without regard. We may rest in the notion that they admit of some explanation. We may acquiesce, with more or less distrust, in theories and expositions, by which it has been attempted to gloss them over. But, in proportion as these books are critically examined, and as knowledge and correct modes of thinking advance, new objections start up. These, from their novelty, often receive a disproportioned share of notice; and much is thought to be

done, if the force of some one that has recently become an object of attention can be broken ; while difficulties more important are comparatively neglected.

Every one knows for how long a time there was a struggle between the authority falsely ascribed to the Old Testament, and the true system of the planetary motions. It is only within the present century that it may be considered as having ceased, so far as the Roman Catholic church, that is, so far as the majority of Christians, is concerned. In our day the discoveries in geology have, in like manner, been encountered by the narrative given in Genesis of the Creation. Attempts, which to many seem abortive, have been made to reconcile them to each other. But, in the mean time, a greater difficulty, as implying greater ignorance of the true constitution of the physical world, has attracted comparatively little notice, though it occurs likewise in the account of the Creation. It is there taught, according to the obvious meaning of language, that the blue vault of heaven is a solid firmament, separating the waters which are above it from the waters on the earth, and that in this firmament the heavenly bodies are placed.*

The supposed necessity of maintaining the truth of all that the writers of the Old Testament have said or implied has operated, as might be expected, in a manner the most prejudicial to a firm and rational faith in Christianity. The philosopher, who cannot but regard many of the representations of the Deity in the Old Testament as inconsistent with his character ; the enlightened Christian, who is unable to believe that God commanded the indiscriminate massacre of men, women, and children, by his chosen people, in order to prepare them for his service ; the moralist, who perceives that the principles and feelings, expressed or approved in portions of these books, belong to an unenlightened and barbarous age ; the careful inquirer, who finds that there are parts of the history which he cannot receive as true,

• “ And God made the firmament and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament : and it was so. And God called the firmament heaven. And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light on the earth.” Genesis, i. 8, 14, 17. Compare the account of the Deluge, in which it is said, that “ the windows of heaven were opened ;” and Psalm cxlviii. 4, where “ the waters above the heavens” are called upon to praise the Lord.

because they involve contradictions, or are contrary to all probability ; he, in a word, who, examining without prejudice, sees the many objections to which the Old Testament is exposed, when put forward as an authoritative guide in religion, morals, and history, (even if such authority be not claimed for it in the physical sciences,) is told that, if he would be a Christian, he must renounce his objections, and that it is a part of his religion to receive the Old Testament as bearing such a character. The solutions of the objections to its supposed character, which have been offered by wise and good men, are often such that it is difficult to believe them to have been satisfactory to the proposer. They proceed on false principles, or assume facts without foundation. They are often superficial, evasive, or incoherent. They appear to result from a feeling of the necessity of saying something. They are often such as can be regarded by any one as admissible only on the ground, that there must be some mode of explaining away all such objections, and, therefore, that there is, in every case, a presumption in favor of a particular explanation, when no other can be found so plausible. Thus, then, the truth of Christianity having been made to appear as if implicated in the truth of a position that cannot be maintained, its evidences, though their intrinsic validity has not been weakened, have been deprived of much of their power over the minds of men.

In expressing these opinions, one is but giving form and voice to the ideas and feelings that exist in the minds of a large portion of intelligent believers. There is nothing in them of novelty or boldness. One is but saying what many have thought before him with more or less distinctness. But he, who discusses the errors that have been connected with our religion, for the purpose of separating them from it, and preventing their further hindrance to its reception and influence, must prosecute his labor under a great disadvantage ; for he is liable to be altogether misunderstood or misrepresented. There are two classes of writers, who, with wholly opposite views, have called attention to these errors. One class consists of those who have confounded them with our religion, who regard them as essential parts of it, who direct their reasoning or their ridicule against them, and, in exposing them, consider themselves as confuting the claims of Christianity. The other class is composed of such as, with a deep sense of the value of our religion, are solicitous to remove from it all that has obscured its charac-

ter and weakened its power. The purpose of one class is the very opposite of that of the other; but they agree as to the nature of the errors. By both they are equally considered as indefensible; and often this correspondence alone is regarded; and the most earnest defenders of Christianity have been confounded with its enemies, by such Christians as agree with its enemies in viewing those errors as essential to our faith.

It is, at the same time, not to be doubted, that he, who has been compelled to renounce many prejudices respecting Christianity is in danger of becoming unable to discriminate between what is true and what is false, and, consequently, of renouncing our religion altogether. As he relinquishes one doctrine after another, which he had held as a part of his faith, a skeptical turn of mind is likely to be formed; a prejudice may grow up against whatever has been received as true; his judgment may become bewildered, and he may lose confidence in its decisions, except when they favor unbelief; while, having been led wrong by the guides whom he had trusted, he is also deprived of that reliance on the judgment of others, which is so often important or necessary to the strength of our convictions, and even to the formation of our opinions. All this may take place in the mind of one whose intentions and feelings are wholly honest. Religious truth, which so many have been seeking for so many centuries, and which, amid the vast diversity and opposition of opinions, it is clear that so few can have found, is not to be secured by mere honesty of intention and feeling. To separate from Christianity what has been erroneously connected with it, and what has become incorporated with the religion of many Christians, I mean, to effect the separation in one's own mind, is not an easy task. It is not strange that some, whose attention has been strongly directed to those errors, should have failed to accomplish it; that they should have wanted the learning and judgment, the power of discrimination, the integrity of purpose, the just conception of the essential character of Christianity, and the deep sense of its value, which are prerequisites and sufficient safeguards in the inquiry; and that, having begun as reformers, they should have ended in being unbelievers.

Equally by those who consecrate the errors of Christians as parts of Christianity, and by those who reject our religion on account of them, a rational Christian is liable to be questioned, how it is that he retains his Christian faith, while he puts aside so much that Christians

have believed ; and it may be suggested to him by both parties, that, if he will but follow out his principles, he will become an infidel. But the gross errors which a great majority of Christians have fallen into, tend in no degree to invalidate the evidences of Christianity. The inquiry concerning those errors has no bearing on the intrinsic weight of its evidences. That the professed disciples of Christ, through eighteen centuries, have not been miraculously divested of the infirmities and vices of their fellow-men, and thus secured from religious error, is a fact, which, however striking or shocking are the illustrations that may be given of it, cannot be brought to disprove the proposition, that Christ was a teacher from God. It does not follow that there is no truth, or that there is no evidence sufficient to establish the truth, concerning the highest objects of human thought, because a very great majority of our race has fallen into essential mistakes concerning them. Christianity may be true, notwithstanding the false doctrines that have accumulated round it ; just as it is true, that the heavenly bodies exist and move, notwithstanding the prevailing theories concerning them from the beginning of science to the sixteenth century were wholly erroneous.

It is evident from what has been said, that he who is about to direct his attention to the errors which men have fallen into respecting religion, should settle in his mind what religion is, and what Christianity is, and in what their value consists. It may be said, that this should be a result of the inquiry, not a preliminary to it ; that we must first ascertain how far Christians have been in error, before we can determine what is to be received as true. But such is not the case. Reasoning philosophically, we are not first to inquire into what men have believed, whether correctly or not ; we are to look only at the essential considerations which should determine our judgment concerning religion and Christianity.

All religion is founded solely on two facts, the existence of God, and the immortality of man. Our relations to the Infinite Spirit and to the endless future alone constitute us religious beings. If we knew, that there was no God and Father of the Universe, and that we were to perish when we die, there could be no religion. It is through faith in God and immortality, that man ceases to appear as a blind, suffering, short-lived creature of earth, and becomes transformed into a being,

capable of the noblest views and aspirations, of unlimited progress in virtue and happiness ; having a permanent tenure in the Universe, the eternal care of God.

Religion must not be confounded with superstition. The belief of error is not the same thing as the belief of truth. The imperfection of language has in this, as in a thousand other cases, led to a great mistake ; for in one sense of the word *religion*, we apply it to the superstitions or false religions, that have existed in the world ; and men have, in consequence, classed them together with true religion, as if they all possessed a character essentially alike. But true religion and false religion are essentially different.

It has been vaguely and erroneously said, that all men, whether enlightened by revelation or not, have a belief in God ; and this belief has been represented as instinctive, or intuitive, as a matter of consciousness, as a part of our nature, or as necessarily resulting from our nature. The proposition has no other foundation than this, that all men are compelled to recognise the fact, that there are powers, that is, agencies, without them, stronger than they, by which their actions are controlled, and their condition essentially affected. To these powers, by an act of imagination and association, similar to that which leads a child to love the inanimate object that pleases it, or to be angry with that which hurts it, men have transferred moral qualities, and thus personified them ; they have endued inanimate objects, with life and worshipped them, as the sun, moon, and stars, or they have ascribed the effects experienced to some imaginary being, or to some being whose power had been felt on earth. But the obvious recognition of an indisputable fact, accompanied by one of the most ordinary operations of the mind, is not religion. It does not constitute faith in God. The believer in the Egyptian mythology, or in the fabulous gods of Greece and Rome, was not a believer in God. There was nothing in his opinions or imaginations to produce those sentiments, or that character, which are the proper result of a Christian's faith. The heathen gods were but rulers of the same essential nature with earthly despots. The belief in them was not elevating but degrading. The heathen religions consecrated vice in their very solemnities, but offered no encouragements to virtue, and no consolations or hopes to suffering man. The Jewish and Christian Scriptures truly represent idolatry, not as it

has been conceived of in modern times, as an imperfect developement of true religion, but as its opposite.

There is no instinctive, intuitive, or direct knowledge of the truths of religion; neither of the being of God, nor of our own immortality. It is scarcely a matter of dispute, if indeed it be at all a matter of dispute, that of our own immortality,—the great fact which changes the aspect of all things and assimilates man to the Divinity; the fact, without the belief, or, at least, without the hope of which, there can be no religion, that of our own immortality we can be assured only by revelation. It may indeed be the case, that a being of perfect reason might, from the phenomena of the present state known to man, infer not only the existence of God, but our power of attaining an immortal existence. But man is not a being of perfect reason; and of the individuals who compose our race there are comparatively very few who have a wide acquaintance with the phenomena of the present state, or who are capable of reasoning on any subject remote from their common experience. It is not necessary, however, to inquire, as if the question were unsettled, what the collective wisdom of men, unassisted by revelation, can effect toward producing a conviction of the essential truths of religion. The question has been answered. It is answered in the teachings of Socrates, and in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. They had no distinct conception of God, as God is conceived of by an enlightened Christian. They had either no belief, or no confident belief, of the personal immortality of individual men. If any one doubt these statements, they require explanation and discussion. But there is something more to be said. The question is further answered—and this answer requires no explanation, for it admits of no controversy—by the state of religion among their contemporaries, by the general absence of any conception of God, or of any assurance of immortality. It is answered in the mythology of the Hindoos, in the adoration of human divinities by the Buddhists, degenerating into the worship of the Dalai-lama, and in the other superstitions which, in ancient and modern times, have overspread the earth where the light of revelation has not shone.

Undoubtedly, there are very noble conceptions of the Divinity, mixed, however, with much that is altogether incongruous, in the speculations of ancient sages. Such conceptions appear, for example, in the writings of Plato, and in the Vedas and other sacred books of the

Hindoo. But the question is not, what a few philosophers, unenlightened by revelation, have believed or imagined, but what the generality of men, unenlightened by revelation, have believed or imagined. However strong the evidence of religious truth from the phenomena of nature may be in the abstract, and very strong undoubtedly it is, yet the fact is proved by the experience of the world, it is proved, I believe, by the personal experience of every one who has thought and felt deeply on the subject, that men, left to themselves, are incapable of grasping and estimating it, and of resting satisfied in the conclusions to which it leads,—conclusions, so remote from the interests and passions of this world, so beyond the sphere of our ordinary experience, and sometimes so apparently contradictory to it. Who, not instructed by revelation, can look on death, and feel assured of immortality? Upon this evidence alone religion has never been established among men. This alone has never solved the difficulties nor quieted the doubts of one anxious and philosophical inquirer. It has never defined the idea of God, as God is revealed by Christianity. It has never afforded any one a conviction of his being formed for eternal progress in improvement and happiness.

Our belief in God, then, as the Father of men, and our belief in our own immortality, truths, which may well seem to be too vast for human comprehension, if we were left to our unassisted powers, rest on our belief, that their evidence is the testimony of God through the mission and teachings of Jesus Christ. I say his mission;—for his mission from God to men, if that fact be established, is alone a virtual revelation of the essential truths of religion. In this age of skepticism and false philosophy, it may be said, that such a communication from God to men is hard to be conceived of or believed. Be it so, but let it be remembered, that on the decision of the question, whether such a communication have been made or not, depends the existence of religion among men;—I do not say of superstition; that flourishes rankly when its growth is not overshadowed and kept down by religion; and still less do I speak of the temporary existence of religious mysticism, which is but another word for feelings, the result of education and habit, for which no reason can be given. Religion is either identified with Christianity, or subsists in those who reject Christianity, through its still remaining power; as an evergreen severed from its root may for a time retain the appearance of life.

The fundamental truths of religion, as taught by Christianity, necessarily imply the fact, or, in other words, involve the truth, that we shall always be subject to the moral government of God ; to that government which connects happiness with the observance of those laws that are essential to the nature of every moral being, and suffering with their transgression. Under this aspect the practical bearing of religion appears. Thus, when assured of the truths which it teaches, we know all that is necessary for our virtue and happiness. We know what may inspire the most glorious hopes, what may animate us in every effort for our own improvement and the service of our fellow-creatures ; we know all that we need to strengthen us for the endless course that lies before us.

With these truths settled in our minds, we may enter without anxiety on the examination of the many and opposite opinions, true and false, which different parties among Christians have connected with their faith in Christianity. In rejecting far the larger number of them as unfounded, an enlightened and well-informed man will perceive that he is merely arriving at conclusions, to which the progress of the human mind in knowledge and in correct modes of thinking has been gradually conducting us ; and that this progress, while it has undermined those errors, has tended equally to confirm the evidence of the essential principles of religion. He will do honor to his predecessors, who, without discerning all the truth, toiled and suffered in opening the way to it. He will not regard himself as superior to those, through whose labors his own intellect has been formed, because through their assistance he has advanced somewhat further than they had done. He will not fancy, that in the present age there has been a great outbreak of wisdom, from some hitherto unknown source, which is to sweep away all that has been established and revered. Nor in his mind will pernicious errors and essential truths be so bound together by his prejudices, that he cannot free himself from the former without loosening the latter from their hold.

Far from it. Every truth concerning our religion and its evidences is connected with and confirms every other ; and in removing an error we are establishing a truth. Then only may we hope, that the evidences of Christianity will be allowed their full weight, and the efficacy of its doctrines be obstructed only by the imperfections and passions essential to our nature, when it shall be presented as it is, separate from all the erroneous opinions and false doctrines that have

been connected with it. As one truth confirms another, so one error gives birth to another, often producing a numerous brood; and the system into which any important error enters, as an essential part, becomes either corrupted throughout, or inconsistent with itself.

These observations will not be regarded as out of place, when it is perceived that the inquiry on which we are about to enter leads to conclusions, different from the opinions which have been professed by the generality of Christians; though, unquestionably, the considerations on which those conclusions are founded have presented themselves to the minds of a great portion of intelligent believers.

I will venture to add a word or two more, having somewhat of a personal bearing. It seems to me a weighty offence against society, to advance and maintain opinions on any important subject, especially any subject connected with religion, without carefully weighing them, and without feeling assured, as far as may be, that we shall find no reason to change our belief. I may be excused, therefore, for mentioning that the substance of what follows was originally committed to writing more than ten years ago (in the summer of 1831), and that I have not since found occasion to make any essential change in my conclusions.

SECTION II.

On the Evidences and the Design of the Jewish Dispensation.

The belief that Moses was an inspired messenger of God follows from our belief in the divine origin of Christianity. He was, we suppose, miraculously commissioned to give to the Jews a knowledge of God, as the Maker and Governor of all things, and such other just conceptions of Him as they were capable of receiving; and to teach them to regard themselves as having been separated from the rest of men, by having been called in a peculiar manner to worship and serve Him. Beside the attestation to the divine origin of the Jewish dispensation furnished by Christianity, there are independent proofs of it, to which, without dwelling upon them at length, it may be worth while to advert.

When we consider what the Jews were in other respects, the simple, direct knowledge which they possessed of God, as the sole Maker and Governor of the Universe, presenting so striking a contrast to the

mythology of the most enlightened portion of the ancient world, affords the strongest confirmation of what they asserted, that its source was a divine revelation. This appears more clearly, when we reflect, that the idea of God was not with them a matter of speculation among a few philosophers, but formed the fundamental doctrine of their popular faith. The mere fact, likewise, of their most extraordinary belief, that they had been separated from all other nations, by being called to worship Him, admits, apparently, of no other solution than that their belief was true. The high and just representations of the Deity, the exalted language of piety, and the noble and enlightened views of duty, which we find in the Scriptures of the Jews, when compared with what appears in other portions of those Scriptures, with the prevailing character of the Jews themselves, and with that of other ancient nations, can, as far as we are able to discern, be referred only to the deep influences of a divine revelation upon their minds. We perceive these influences in the formation of poetical writings of a kind to which nothing similar can be produced. They are compositions of the most marked religious character, altogether unlike the poetry of other ancient nations. The individuals addressed are throughout regarded under one aspect, as distinguished from all other men by the peculiar relation in which they stood towards God. In the more eminent of these works, in those, for example, which have been ascribed to Isaiah, we perceive, that the powerful mind, the strong feelings, and splendid imagination of the writer, had been thoroughly wrought upon by religious convictions, which we cannot reasonably ascribe to the unaided progress of the human intellect among the Jews. Looking to the time when that people were already in possession of those wonderful books, we have to cast our view back to a period lighted only by a few gleams of authentic history. Here, we see men collecting in groups to listen to the poems of Homer, in which the objects of their worship are pictured with the vices and passions of the gross and ferocious chieftains of the age; there, we behold the gigantic monuments which Egyptian superstition had raised to its monster gods; all around is the darkness and error of polytheism, in one form or other, except where a small people rises distinctly to view, separate from the rest of mankind; a people of which there are now no famous monuments, but its own continued existence and its sacred writings. Among the Jews, long before Socrates would have taught the Athenians the goodness and providence of the *gods*, there was a

familiar conception of God; and their prophets could thus address them:—

“Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Jehovah is the eternal God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He faints not, neither is weary. There is no searching of his understanding.”

“Thus says Jehovah, the king of Israel, I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God.”

“Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says Jehovah.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

They who habitually expressed these and corresponding conceptions of the Supreme Being, believed that they had derived them from express revelation; and there appears no good reason for doubting the correctness of their belief.

But it is not merely in the more remarkable portions of Hebrew poetry, that we find conceptions which we can account for only by referring them to a divine revelation. The Jews have left us a large collection of books, most of them in existence five centuries before Christ, throughout which, with the exception of two (the Song of Solomon, so called, and the Book of Esther), there runs a constant recognition of the being, providence, and moral government of God. The Old Testament, so insulated from all other productions of the human mind in ancient times, presents a great phenomenon in the intellectual history of our race. We may explain it at once, if we admit the divine origin of the Jewish religion; and what other solution but this can be offered?

There is another striking consideration. We can discern nothing but the fact, that the religion of the Jews had been confirmed to them by indisputable evidence, as a revelation from God, which could have wrought in their minds such an invincible conviction of its truth, as to have preserved them a distinct people from a period beyond any connected and authentic records of profane history to the present day. In maintaining their faith they were for more than twenty centuries ex-

posing themselves to the outrages of Heathens and Christians;—to a persecution which even now has not everywhere subsided. Driven from their native soil, scattered among enemies, insulted, trampled upon, cruelly wronged, they have still clung to their religion, the cause of their sufferings, with inveterate constancy. From an antiquity which would be shrouded in darkness, were not a dim light cast upon it by their own history, this small people has flowed down an unmingled stream amid the stormy waves of the world. For a phenomenon so marvellous it is idle to assign any ordinary causes. One cause alone explains it. We must regard it as an inexplicable wonder, or we must believe, that this people were, as they profess, separated from the rest of men by God, and this in a manner so evident, solemn and effectual, that the ineffaceable belief of the fact has been transmitted from generation to generation, as an essential characteristic of the race.

Thus we perceive, that, beside the attestation of Christianity to its truth, the Jewish dispensation has independent evidence of its own; evidence, which, so intimate is the connection between them, is reflected on Christianity itself.

If it be asked, what was the design of the Jewish dispensation, the answer seems to be, that its main, I do not say its sole, purpose was to serve as a groundwork for Christianity. Supposing that no nation like the Jews had existed, and that polytheism had prevailed throughout the world, a messenger from God, such as Jesus Christ, must have had no small difficulty to encounter on the very threshold of his ministry, in making his character and office understood by men ignorant of God. If he had appeared, for instance, at Athens or Rome, the very annunciation of his claims to authority would have been a sudden and strange attack on the whole established system of religion. A new and vast conception, that of God, must have been formed in the minds of men, before they could have a notion of the peculiar office of him who addressed them. When we look at the state of either city, it seems scarcely possible that he should have been able to collect an audience, except of such as might have flocked to him as an extraordinary magician or theurgist. If we imagine him to have been listened to by some with deference, as a religious teacher, yet how large a portion of such hearers would have confounded the idea of the Supreme Being, *to whom there is nothing similar or second*, with that of Jupiter, to whom in a

very limited sense, and in the language of poetical flattery, they had been accustomed to apply such expressions ; and how many might have mistaken the messenger himself for *Mercury, or some other god, come down in the likeness of a man.** There would have been no preparation for his advent, no expectation of it, no previous conception of its nature. It would have been an insulated, incomprehensible event, connected with nothing in their history or their former belief. The ground would not have been cleared for exhibiting before mankind the marvellous transactions of such a ministry as that of Christ.

This view of the important purpose of the Jewish dispensation may further tend to assure us of its divine origin. But to maintain that Moses was a minister of God is one thing, and to maintain that he was the author of the Pentateuch is another. So far is the truth of either proposition from being involved in that of the other, that, in order to render it evident that Moses was from God, it may be necessary to prove that the books which profess to contain a history of his ministry were not written by him, and do not afford an authentic account of it. Whether this be so or not, may appear in some degree from what follows, in which I shall examine the probability of the supposition that these books were written by Moses.

SECTION III.

On the Historical Evidence respecting the Authorship of the Pentateuch.

In determining whether an ancient work is to be ascribed to a particular author, we must begin with the historical evidence.

Respecting the Pentateuch we will first consider *the evidence that relates to its history subsequent to the return of the Jews from their Captivity* (B. C. 536). This evidence is sufficient to render it probable, that it was in existence somewhere about a century after that event. The date that has been assigned for Ezra's reading "the Law of Moses" to the people, as related in the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, is the year 454 before Christ.† "Ezra," says Prideaux, "reformed the whole

* Acts xiv. 11, 12.

† That is, about a thousand years, as commonly reckoned, after the death of Moses, B. C. 1451.

state of the Jewish Church according to the Law of Moses, in which he was excellently learned, and settled it upon that bottom, upon which it afterwards stood to the time of our Saviour.”* This statement expresses what has been the common belief on the subject. Perhaps too much agency may be ascribed in it to Ezra alone. But it seems not improbable, that within his lifetime the Jews who had returned to Palestine were formed anew into a state on the basis, generally, of the Levitical Law. Ezra, it is said, read the Book of the Law of Moses to the people. But there is nothing to identify this Book of the Law with the whole five books of the Pentateuch. Admitting that the Levitical Law existed in all its extent in the time of Ezra, yet we cannot infer from this fact alone, that it was then incorporated with the historical portion of the Pentateuch. If this union, however, did not then exist, it was probably effected not long after. The Septuagint translation of the Pentateuch was made in the first half of the third century before Christ. The origin of the Samaritan Pentateuch (that which was used by the Samaritans, written in their own alphabetical characters), we may, with Prideaux and others,† refer to the time when a temple was built on Mount Gerizim, and the temple-worship introduced among the Samaritans by Manasseh and his associates, as related by Josephus. This, according to Josephus,‡ was during the reign of Alexander, about 330 years before Christ. Some, however, have assigned to it an earlier date, namely, about the beginning of the fourth century before Christ.§

But, if the Pentateuch existed in the time of Ezra, or not long after, this fact alone does not afford any proof that it was then ascribed to Moses as its author. To this point we shall hereafter advert. But we may here observe, that the Pentateuch itself, while it assumes to be an authentic account of the deeds and laws of Moses, puts forward no claim to being considered as his work. Though he were not regarded

* Prideaux's *Connection of the History of the Old and New Testament*, Part i. Book 5. Vol. ii. p. 460. 10th Ed. 1729.

† Prideaux's *Connection*, Part i. Book 6. Vol. ii. p. 597, seqq.—Simon, *Histoire Crit. du V. T.* Liv. i. c. 10.—Idem, *Critique de la Bibliothèque et des Prolégomènes de M. Du Pin.* Tome iii. p. 148, seqq.—Van Dale, *De Origine et Progressu Idolatriæ*, pp. 75-82. p. 681, seqq.—Gesenius, *De Pentateucho Samaritano*, § 2.

‡ *Antiq. Jud. Lib.* xi. cc. 7, 8.

§ Compare Josephus with Nehemiah, xiii. 28, and see Prideaux's *Connection*, P. i. B. 6. Vol. ii. p. 588, seqq.

as its author in the time of Ezra, it might be readily received by the Jews as bearing the character of an authentic document.

The fact, that "the Law" was ascribed to Moses does not prove that the authorship of the Pentateuch was ascribed to him. But that he was generally regarded by the Jews as its author, about the commencement of our era, appears from Philo, the writers of the New Testament, and Josephus. The prevalence of this opinion at that time shows that it was not of recent origin; but affords no ground for determining its antiquity within any precise limits.

We have no further knowledge of the history of the Pentateuch between the time of the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the commencement of the Christian era, an interval of more than five centuries, except that it was included in the class of books which at the last-mentioned date we find considered by the Jews as sacred books, or, in other words, included in the "Canon," as it is called, of the Old Testament. Respecting this canon there are also some traditions of the Jews which deserve notice. We will next attend, therefore, to its history, and to these traditions.

From an age considerably before the time of Josephus, as is evident from a passage in that writer, and from other considerations on which our subject does not require us to dwell, the books *now regarded by Protestants* as forming the Old Testament,* have been recognised by the Jews as sacred books. But this canon was not formed, or, in other words, it was not settled what books should be classed together as possessing in some respects a common, I do not say a sacred, character, till after the return of the Jews to Palestine. This is evident from the fact of its containing books, about which there is no controversy, that they were not written till after that event, namely, the Chronicles, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and those of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Of the history of the formation of the canon we are wholly ignorant. In the reign of Josiah, a little before the commencement of the Captivity, it appears, from a narrative in the Book of Kings, that

* To these the Council of Trent (A.D. 1546) added, as of equal authority, all those books, and parts of books, which constitute the Apocrypha of our English Bibles, except the two books of Esdras (Ezra), so called, and the prayer of Manasseh. It is not here the place to give an account of the manner in which the more intelligent Roman Catholics explain, or evade, this decree of the last General Council,—the last which will ever be held.

the Jews generally were ignorant of the existence of a written copy of their national laws, before the discovery, as represented, of such a copy in the Temple.* On their return, it is probable that a large majority of them, taken individually, were not acquainted with all those writings of the Old Testament which were then extant. Some, perhaps, knew of one work and some of another. Such being the case, we have no credible information respecting the manner in which these books, together with the others afterwards classed with them, were brought into notice, and finally came to be considered as the sacred books of the nation. But though we have no direct evidence on this subject, we have perhaps ground for a probable conjecture. These books are very diverse in their character. The contents of many of them, as, for example, Ruth, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Ezra, and Nehemiah, (to mention no others,) are such as not to afford any very obvious reason or occasion for ascribing to them a sacred character. The admission of these books into the canon is to be viewed in connection with the fact, that no ancient Hebrew work not included in it is known to have existed at the time when the canon may be supposed to have been completed. Hence we may infer, that this class of books was formed upon *no principle of selection*. It is probable, that it comprehended *all* the remains of the ancient literature of the nation; all books,—that is to say, all books intended for general use, and of any value or notoriety,—which had escaped the ravages of war and the injuries of time. They had all a common character, as, with the exception of the use of the Chaldee language in portions of two of those of latest date, Ezra and Daniel, they were all written in the Hebrew language, a language which had become obsolete. Far the greater portion of them were of the highest national interest, as relating either to the religion and laws of the nation, or to its history, which was so intimately connected with the national religion. Others of a different kind had, or were supposed to have, sufficient claims to be classed with them; as the Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, the latter of which, and many of the former, were ascribed to the most powerful monarch of the nation, the wisest of men. We perceive at once how a sacred character might be assigned to many of these books; and it is easy to understand how such a character should, in process of time, be extended to all.

We are ignorant how far the preservation of these books, and their

* 2 Kings xxii.

final reception as sacred writings, were the result of a general estimate of their value, or how much was effected by the care and efforts of some leading individual or individuals. One fact, however, respecting them is evident. Some of them must have been compiled after the composition of the parts, or writings, of which they are respectively formed; as the book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs (which consists of several collections of those ascribed to Solomon, together with those ascribed to Agar, and those, as is said, of the mother of a King Lemuel, who is not elsewhere mentioned*), and the works of some of the prophets, which consist of separate and unconnected prophecies or poems. In the compilation of the latter works there is little doubt that errors have been committed; and that compositions have been ascribed to some of the prophets, particularly to Isaiah, of which they were not the authors. The book of Nehemiah, likewise, was originally united with that of Ezra, as forming together with it one work, to which the name of the latter was given; and it appears that Ezra was regarded as in some sense the author of both. Each of these two books, moreover, appears to be a compilation, inartificially put together, so as to occasion historical and chronological difficulties. Only a portion of each can be referred to the individual whose name it bears.

It has been commonly said by modern writers, that Ezra, after the return from the Captivity, revised and re-edited the books of the Old Testament; that is, as the proposition must be understood, those books which were extant at the time of his performing this work. The statement rests on a Jewish tradition. But this tradition first appears at much too late a period to be regarded as any evidence of the fact. It, moreover, presents itself in a shape obviously fabulous. It is not mentioned by Philo or Josephus; nor is it found in the Talmud. There is a passage in what is called the Second Book of Esdras (Ezra), a book of uncertain origin and date, published among the Apocrypha of the English Bible, which appears to be founded on it. In this passage the Law is said to have been burnt, so that no man knew the things that had been done by God; and Ezra is represented as proposing, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to write over again what had been written in the Law.† The tradition in question is to be traced princi-

* See Proverbs i. 1; x. 1; xxv. 1; xxx. 1; xxxi. 1.

† 2 Esdras xiv. 21, seqq.

pally in the works of the Christian fathers, who undoubtedly derived it from the Jews. The earliest writer by whom it is distinctly mentioned is Irenæus, who lived six centuries after the time of Ezra. He says, that, "the Scriptures having been destroyed" at the time of the Captivity, God "inspired Ezra to put in order all the words of the preceding prophets, and to restore to the people the Law which was given by Moses."* A similar account is found in Clement of Alexandria. The Scriptures being destroyed, he says, Ezra was inspired to renew them, and to make them known again to the people.† Tertullian says, that "it is well known that, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the whole body of the Jewish writings was restored anew by Ezra."‡ Chrysostom seems to have been unwilling to admit the marvellous part of the story in its full extent; for, though he speaks of the books of the Jewish Scriptures as having been burnt, he appears not to have been disposed to believe that they were utterly destroyed. God, he says, who had inspired Moses and the Prophets, "inspired another admirable man, Ezra, to set them forth, and put them together *from their remains*."§ Theodoret, on the one hand, represents the books as having been entirely destroyed, and restored by Ezra, through divine inspiration.|| The tradition which appears under these forms shows, that the Jews, at the time when they transmitted their ancient books to Christians, were ignorant of the history of them, and had substituted fables for facts.

This is further made evident by a tradition preserved in the Talmud concerning their canonical books.¶ "Moses," it is there said, "wrote his book, the section concerning Balaam,** and Job. Joshua wrote his book, and eight verses which are in the Law.†† Samuel wrote his book,

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. iii. c. 21. § 2. p. 216.

† Stromat. i. § 21. p. 392. § 22. p. 410.

‡ De Cultu Feminarum, § 3. p. 151.

§ Homil. viii. in Epist. ad. Hebræos.

|| Interpret. in Cant. Cantic. Opp. i. 984, 985.

¶ Vid. Wolfi Biblioth. Rabbin. Tom. ii. pp. 2, 3.

** "The section concerning Balaam, or of Balaam." These words have been differently understood by the later Jewish commentators. Some suppose, that Moses wrote a separate account of Balaam, apart from the Pentateuch. Others, that the account found in the Pentateuch (Numbers xxii.-xxiv.) was translated by Moses from a book written by Balaam himself. See Fabricii Codex Pseudepigr. V. T. Tom. i. pp. 809, 810.

†† This seems to refer to what is said in Joshua xxiv. 26.

the book of Judges, and Ruth. David wrote the book of Psalms with the assistance [*per manus*] of ten of the Elders, Adam, Melchisedec, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Jeduthan, Asaph, and the three sons of Korah.* Jeremiah wrote his book, the book of Kings, and the Lamentations. Hezekiah [the king of Judah], with his ministers, *wrote*† the prophecies of Isaiah, the Proverbs, the Canticles, and Ecclesiastes. The men of the Great Synagogue‡ *wrote* Ezekiel, the twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and Esther. Ezra wrote his book§ and the Chronicles."

Thus far we have found nothing which bears the character of historical evidence to show that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. We have found no proof even that such was the opinion of the Jews in the time of Ezra. Nor, indeed, have we found any decisive proof, that the Pentateuch was in existence in his time; for we have no good reason for believing, that, when the Law of Moses is spoken of, the Pentateuch is necessarily intended. But, could it be proved that the Pentateuch, in the time of Ezra, was believed by the Jews to be the work of Moses, we should still be a thousand years distant from the time of Moses; and an opinion respecting the authorship of a book,

* The Jews ascribed the ninety-second Psalm to Adam, the hundred and tenth to Melchisedec, the ninetieth to Moses, whose name appears in the inscription to it in our English Bible, and others to the different individuals mentioned, whose names, with the exception of that of Abraham, are likewise found in the present inscriptions of the Psalms.

† This word *wrote*, here, and where it is again italicized, appears to be used very loosely, and in different senses, in respect to the different books mentioned. It is to be understood, perhaps, in reference to some of these books, as meaning that the persons spoken of committed to writing what before had been orally preserved; and, in respect to others, that they brought together the different parts of which the book is formed; that they compiled it. In reference to the book of Esther, it may mean that they composed it.

The notion, that Hezekiah, with his associates, was engaged in this work, was undoubtedly derived from Proverbs xxv. 1. "These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out."

‡ The Great Synagogue, according to a fiction of the Jewish Rabbins, was a council of one hundred and twenty men, over whom Ezra presided, and who assisted him in the reestablishment of the polity and religion of the nation after the return of the Jews to Palestine. See Buxtorf's Tiberias, cap. x. p. 98, seqq.

§ By "his book," as already mentioned, is meant not only that which passes under the name of Ezra, but likewise that ascribed to Nehemiah.

existing at a period a thousand years distant from the time of its supposed writer, cannot be regarded as historical evidence.

It is clear, therefore, from the nature of the case, that there exists no historical evidence, that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, unless it may be found in some of the other books which compose the Jewish canon. No other documents make such an approach toward the time of Moses, as may entitle them to any weight in support of the supposition, that he was the author of the Pentateuch. We will, then, next consider *the historical evidence which has been thought to be furnished by the Old Testament itself.*

In the other books of the Old Testament there are references to various narratives and laws now found in the Pentateuch, and these references have been considered as proving, that the Pentateuch was in existence before their composition, and consequently as furnishing indirect proof that it was written by Moses. But such references afford no ground for these conclusions ; for, if the Pentateuch were not the work of Moses, it was undoubtedly, in great part, a compilation (derived from ancient authorities, written or oral, or both), which was made for the purpose of embodying and preserving the traditions and national laws of the Jews : and there is no reason why these traditions and laws should not have been referred to as well before its existence as after.

In the Book of Joshua there is repeated mention of "the Book of the Law of Moses ;" and hence it has been argued, that we have evidence of the earliest date to justify us in ascribing the Pentateuch to Moses. But such is not the case. We must here, as elsewhere, keep in mind, that there is nothing to identify "the Book of the Law of Moses," or, in other words, a written collection of the laws ascribed to Moses, with the whole Pentateuch, previously to the time when it may be proved, by wholly independent evidence, that those laws were to be found in the last four books of the Pentateuch, and that the whole five had become so connected together as to be designated by the common title of "the Book of the Law." But, though it may be well to keep this consideration in view, yet it is not important in its bearing on the case before us. The main fact to be at present attended to is, that there is no evidence to show, when or by whom the Book of Joshua was written. Its history and age are at least as uncertain as those of the five books ascribed to Moses ; and it is so connected with them, and liable to so many

common or similar objections, that its authority must stand or fall together with that of the Pentateuch.*

* It is remarkable, that the references in Joshua to a Book of the Law, when taken together, are of such a character, as rather to throw discredit on the work in which they are found, than to serve to confirm the credit of any other. In the first chapter (vv. 7, 8,) Joshua is represented as being enjoined by the Lord "to do according to all the Law which Moses commanded," and "to meditate day and night on the Book of the Law." Here, by "the Book of the Law," it may seem that the writer intended either the whole Pentateuch, or the book of Deuteronomy alone. I mention the last supposition, because there seem to be no clear references in Joshua to any book of the Pentateuch except Deuteronomy. If, however, this book alone were referred to as the Book of the Law, it would prove the writer's ignorance or disregard of the four other books of the Pentateuch, and afford proof, that in his day they were either not in existence, or not attributed to Moses. It may be assumed, therefore, that the whole Pentateuch is meant. In the last chapter (v. 26) it is said, that Joshua wrote "these words" (it is not clear what words are intended) in "the Book of the Law of God." Here again it may seem that some copy either of Deuteronomy or of the whole Pentateuch is intended. In the eighth chapter, after the account of the taking of Ai, on the confines of Palestine, Joshua is immediately represented as proceeding, with the whole nation of the Israelites, to Mount Ebal in the centre of the enemy's country, (fearless of his foes, and unmolested by them,) and there erecting an altar according to the directions in "the Book of the Law of Moses" (v. 31). The directions referred to are in the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy; and "the Book of the Law of Moses" must have the same meaning here as the corresponding terms in the passages before quoted. But the narrative immediately goes on to say (vv. 32, 34, 35) that Joshua wrote on the stones of the altar, in the presence of the children of Israel, "a copy of the Law of Moses;" and "afterwards read all the words of the Law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel." Here, as it is incredible that Joshua should have engraved, or written, the whole Pentateuch on the stones of the altar, it has been imagined by some, that only the book of Deuteronomy was intended; but this is also incredible. Others, therefore, have supposed, that "the Law of Moses" here means only the blessings and cursings recorded in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters of Deuteronomy. But this is inconsistent with the use of the term, not merely elsewhere, but, as we have seen, in this account itself. These blessings and curses are nowhere else called "the Law of Moses," nor could they be so with propriety. They were the sanctions of the Law, not the Law itself. Beside, it is evident that Joshua read to the people the same which he had written on the altar. Now, according to the directions in Deuteronomy (xxvii. 14), it was not his business, but that of the Levites, to pronounce those blessings and curses. Others, therefore, have thought, that by "the Law of Moses," as here used, the Ten Commandments only are meant. But, beside that this supposition, like that last

In the seventh verse of the fortieth Psalm, ascribed to David, there is mention of a book, which has been supposed to be the Pentateuch. The verse is thus given in the Common Version.

"Then, said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book* it is written of me."

The meaning of the words is uncertain, and they have been variously rendered and explained. But the passage, however understood, would, at most, prove only, that in the time of David (if he were its writer), that is, according to the common computation, about four centuries after the death of Moses, the Jews possessed some book which they mentioned, gives a meaning to the term inconsistent with its common use, and especially with its use immediately before, it may be added, that, if the writer had only intended to say, that Joshua read the Ten Commandments, he would hardly have insisted so strongly upon his having read the whole Law, omitting not a word.

The relation, therefore, appears not like the history of a real event, but like the narrative of one who did not well consider what he was writing.

But this account in the Book of Joshua is to be compared with the directions which Moses is represented to have given, in Deuteronomy xxvii. 2-8. On these directions it is founded, and they are liable to similar objections with the account itself. Moses, it is said, ordered, that after the Israelites had passed the Jordan, they should "set up great stones, and plaster them with plaster," "and write upon the stones *all the words of this Law*, very plainly." By "all the words of this Law," it is clear, from a comparison of many passages in Deuteronomy, in which these or equivalent terms are used, that the author or compiler of that book could have meant *nothing less* than the whole body of laws contained in it. On the supposition, that the book of Deuteronomy originally formed a part of the Pentateuch, and was written by Moses in connection with the other four books, the terms in question must denote the whole Pentateuch. For Moses, it is said (xxxi. 24-26), "made an end of writing *the words of this Law* in a book," and gave it to the Levites to be deposited by the side of the ark of the covenant, for a witness against the nation. Had he written the whole of the Pentateuch, he would not have separated the book of Deuteronomy from it to be thus preserved alone, as containing the words of the Law. We cannot on that supposition believe that the book, which he gave to the Levites to be thus scrupulously cared for, was not the whole Pentateuch, with the exception, of course, of those portions of it which he could not have written. That it was the whole Pentateuch has generally been admitted, or contended for, by those who have regarded the Pentateuch as the work of Moses.

* The words should be rendered; "in the scroll of the book," meaning simply "the book." The periphrasis (which was perhaps used as a more solemn expression) is founded on the manner in which books were anciently written, in the form of a roll.

believed to teach what God had prescribed to them. There is no evidence that this book was the Pentateuch. On the contrary, it seems altogether improbable, that it was any book inculcating the ceremonial law of the Jews, as that is laid down in the Pentateuch, considering how the passage is introduced and connected. Such, on the contrary, is the unqualified manner in which it is asserted, that sacrifices were not required by God, that the passage may be considered as affording strong proof, that, at the time when it was written, the Pentateuch did not exist.

“ In sacrifice and oblation thou hast no pleasure :

Mine ears thou hast opened :*

Burnt-offering and sin-offering thou dost not desire :

Therefore, I said, Lo, I come :

In the scroll of the book it is written of me :

Oh my God ! to do thy will is my delight,

And thy law dwells in my heart.”†

In the scroll of the book it is written of me : this is a verbal rendering ; and in these words it may seem most probable, that the Psalmist did not refer to any book, properly speaking, but to that book, in which, according to an imagination common from his day to our own, God is conceived of as recording both what he sees, and more especially what he wills and purposes,—the book, as it may be called, of the Divine Mind.‡ He may be understood as saying, Lo ! I come, as thou hast written, that is, as thou hast purposed, concerning me.

With the exception of the passages that have been referred to in the Book of Joshua, there is no express mention of a Book of the Law ascribed to Moses in any writing of the Old Testament, which has been supposed to be of an age prior to the Captivity. § No such book is mentioned in the Books, or rather Book, of Samuel. By the pro-

* That is, Thou hast made me hear thy voice ; Thou hast enabled me to understand thy will.

† This version varies a little from that of the Rev. Dr. Noyes ; whose Translations of the Psalms, of Job, and of the Prophets, are, I believe, well entitled to the reputation they enjoy, among those to whom they are known, of being the best in our language.

‡ See Psalm lvi. 8 ; lxix. 28 ; lxxxvii. 6 ; cxxxix. 16. Isaiah iv. 3 ; xxxiv. 16 ; lxxv. 6. Daniel vii. 10 ; xii. 1. Exod. xxxii. 32, 33.

§ The Captivity commenced, according to the common computation, in the year 606 before Christ, that is, about eight centuries and a half after the death of

phets, the public teachers of religion among the Jews, such a book is nowhere spoken of. No evidence can be drawn from their writings of the existence of the Pentateuch, or of any book ascribed to Moses as its author. The fact is important as regards our present inquiry. It amounts to more than a mere absence of proof, that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. Considering that the prophets were the public teachers of religion, the fact, that there is no distinct notice in their writings of a book ascribed to the great Lawgiver of the nation, a book which must have been the fundamental document in all that concerned religion, creates a strong suspicion that no such book was in existence, or, as regards the prophets after the Captivity, that no such book had been handed down with the authority of antiquity. What should we think of a series of Christian teachers, from whose works no satisfactory evidence could be deduced of the existence of the New Testament?

We come, then, to the Books of Kings, or rather the Book of Kings, as it should be called, there being no ground for the division either of Samuel, the Kings, or the Chronicles, into two books. Each was reckoned in the Hebrew Canon but as one work. The Book of Kings (to speak of it in the singular number) is brought down to the thirty-seventh year of the Captivity,* about nine centuries, as commonly computed, after the death of Moses. It is unimportant, as it regards our present inquiry, whether it was written, or rather compiled, during the continuance, or after the termination, of the Captivity. Any testimony in this work, did such testimony exist, to the supposed fact, that Moses wrote the Pentateuch nine hundred years before, would be of no weight. But the work contains no testimony to this effect. We find words ascribed to David, as his dying charge to Solomon, in which he exhorts him "to keep all the statutes, commands, decrees, and ordinances of the Lord, as written in the Law of Moses."† The writer

Moses.—I except, in the sentence above, the book of Joshua, because that *has been supposed to have been* written before the Captivity, and even by Joshua himself. Nothing can well be more untenable than the latter supposition. The fact, that it was ascribed to him by the same Jewish tradition which has assigned their supposed authors to other parts of the Old Testament, serves to show how little credit that tradition is entitled to. We have no knowledge by whom the book of Joshua was written. Its composition was apparently subsequent to that of Deuteronomy.

* 2 Kings xxv. 27.

† 1 Kings ii. 3.

speaks in his own person of "what is written in the Law of Moses," quoting a passage to be found only in Deuteronomy.* And he gives an account of the discovery in the Temple, by the high-priest Hilkiah, of "the Book of the Law," during the reign of Josiah.† (B. C. 624, as computed.) These and other passages in which "the Law," or "the Law of Moses," is mentioned, prove that before the composition of the Book of the Kings, the Jews possessed a written code of laws, which bore the name of Moses. But, without supposing this code to have been written by Moses, we cannot doubt that, by whomsoever compiled, it included all those precepts and laws which were given, or which the Jews believed to have been given, by him. As many as could by any plausible tradition, or perhaps by any plausible invention, be ascribed to him, would be so ascribed. Additional laws might be represented as mere deductions from those of which he was the real or reputed author. Hence it is easy to understand, why a code of Jewish laws, whenever compiled, should be called the Law of Moses. But the existence of such a code does not prove that the five books of the Pentateuch were written by Moses.

On the contrary, it seems impossible plausibly to reconcile the narrative just referred to, of the discovery in the Temple of a copy of "the Book of the Law," with the supposition, that this book was the Pentateuch, and that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. It is plain that, according to that account, the book was before unknown to Josiah, a religious prince, to his secretary Shaphan, and to the high-priest Hilkiah. It cannot, therefore, be supposed, that the existence of such a book was known to any of the higher officers of the state, or to any of the principal priests; and if, during a religious reign, which had continued for eighteen years, it was unknown to them, we cannot reasonably suppose that it was known to any one, or, to say the least, that it was generally known. But the Pentateuch, if written by Moses, was the most venerable and valuable possession of the nation, and an object of the highest interest, not only to every religious man, but to every Jew not destitute of the love of his country, or a sense of the true honor of his people. It was the work in which the Law-giver of the nation, the messenger of God, had related the wonderful events of his own ministry, and announced those ordinances which God had appointed through him. It was not merely the proper foundation of the

* 2 Kings xiv. 6. Comp. Deut. xxiv. 16.

† 2 Kings xxii. 8, seqq.

religion and polity of the state, it was in itself the national code of laws, civil and ceremonial. It is difficult to believe that such a book should have been so forgotten. It had survived the long period (about three centuries, as commonly supposed,) of anarchy, barbarism, and subjugation, following the death of Joshua. If it had ever been recognised and honored as the work of Moses, it must have been so in the age of Solomon. From his reign to that of Josiah was a period of somewhere about three centuries and a half. According to the history, the kings of Judah, during the larger part of this time, maintained the national religion. If these kings knew and regarded an express ordinance contained in the Pentateuch,* they had each made a copy of it. If they knew and obeyed another requisition, they had caused it to be read to the assembled people every Sabbatical year.† We have, indeed, good reason to believe that this had not been done; for, as we shall hereafter have occasion to remark, the Sabbatical years had not been observed. But, had the Pentateuch been in existence and regarded as the work of Moses, it cannot be supposed, that, during the long periods when the kings of Judah "did right in the sight of the Lord," they took no effectual means of making known to the people the fundamental book of their religion, and the code of laws which they were bound to obey, or that there were not many among the priests, the prophets, and the better sort of the nation, who were always interested in its study and preservation. We may compare the period of less than four centuries between the reigns of Solomon and Josiah, with the period of fourteen centuries, which intervened between the destruction of Jerusalem and the first printing of the Pentateuch. During this time, the Jews, though scattered among their enemies, and everywhere trampled down by hatred and cruelty, preserved, even amid the barbarism of the dark ages, copies of what they then considered as the work of Moses, though few only of their number were able to read it. But, according to the narrative in the Book of Kings, if we suppose it to relate to the Pentateuch, and suppose the Pentateuch to be the work of Moses, it would appear that this work, carrying with it the authority of God, and of the highest interest to the nation, had been so little valued, and had fallen into such oblivion, that, but for an accident, or an interposition of Providence, it might have perished from men's knowledge; and this, though other works written before the

* Deuteronomy xvii. 18.

† Ibid. xxxi. 10, 11.

Captivity were preserved, and though there had been for two centuries a succession of prophets in Judah and Israel, whose works escaped such neglect.

It follows, therefore, as I conceive, that, whatever were the book produced in the reign of Josiah, it could not have been the Pentateuch, if the Pentateuch were the work of Moses. But, if it were any other book, the Pentateuch was not then in existence, or not considered as the work of Moses, for, had it been in existence and so considered, no other book would have been entitled "the Book of the Law," and produced for the regulation of the national religion.

The book actually produced was, according to the narrative concerning it, a body of laws, professedly resting on divine authority. It may have been one of the documents afterwards made use of in the formation of the Pentateuch. Perhaps it was, as some have conjectured, the book of Deuteronomy, or perhaps it was a book which afterwards served for the basis of that work. It was brought forward to aid the reformation from idolatry under Josiah; and the story of its being accidentally found in the Temple may be thought to have been what was considered a justifiable artifice, to account for the appearance of a book hitherto unknown.

In tracing our course downward from Moses we have now arrived at the period of the reestablishment of the Jews in Palestine, after the Captivity, the period to which we have before ascended. It is unnecessary to examine critically any supposed notices of the Pentateuch in the books of the Old Testament written after that event. We have seen, that, when the Book of Kings was written, a code of national laws was extant, ascribed to Moses; and those supposed notices prove nothing more.

On reviewing the ground we have gone over, it may appear that no direct historical evidence exists, that the Pentateuch was the work of Moses. But it may be said, that there is strong indirect evidence for this supposition, in the fact, that from the time of Moses the Levitical Law was regarded by the Jews as their national law; that its religious rites were observed by them, its festivals celebrated, and all its statutes, civil and criminal, considered as binding, except when the nation fell into sin and idolatry.

In such statements much is assumed which cannot be proved. It appears, that before the Captivity there was a temple at Jerusalem, and priests and Levites, and sacrifices, and other religious rites ; but it does not appear, that the Levitical Law had been, from the time of Moses, the national law of the Jews. On the contrary, there is much that is inconsistent with this supposition.

In proof of it we must not argue from books written after the return of the Jews to Palestine, when we may suppose the Pentateuch to have been in existence, and the Levitical Law to have been established. From the circumstances of the case, the evidence, direct or indirect, which they may seem to afford, is altogether questionable. I refer particularly to the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, and the Chronicles. The compiler of the Chronicles, especially, seems to have given a strong coloring to the ancient history of his nation, derived from the feelings, customs, and institutions of his own age, for the purpose of recommending the Levitical Law to his countrymen by the supposed example and authority of their ancestors. His work appears to have been founded principally on the Books of Samuel and the Kings ; or, to say the least, there is no probability, that, in the portion of his history coincident with what is contained in those books, he had any other authentic documents than what their authors possessed. But in comparing the accounts in those books with the accounts in the Chronicles, we see at once how much the author of this later work has added concerning priests and Levites, and religious ceremonies. As a single illustration of the general character of his work we may take the narrative of the removal of the ark by David to Jerusalem, in the thirteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of the first book of Chronicles, as compared with the account in the sixth chapter of the second book of Samuel. In the Chronicles the priests and Levites play a principal part. In the Book of Samuel they do not appear at all. The ark is not borne by Levites, as it should have been, according to the Levitical Law, and, contrary to that Law, the sacrifices are offered not by priests but by David.*

* The character of the Book of Chronicles, as stated above, was first, I believe, distinctly pointed out and illustrated by De Wette, in his "Critical Essay on the Credibility of the Books of the Chronicles" (in German). Though one may be far from assenting to all that is said by De Wette, yet what is essential in his positions respecting the Chronicles seems to be satisfactorily established ; and if

Without entering into any critical inquiry, but receiving the accounts of the earlier Jewish historians, as they lie before us, it is evident, that, from the death of Joshua to the time when David proposed to erect a national temple, (a period, as computed, of about four centuries,) there could have been, consistently with the accounts in the books of Judges and of Samuel, no regular observance of the Levitical Law by the Jewish nation. Nor in the interval between the time when Solomon fell into idolatry* and the time of the Captivity could this law have been uniformly respected by the Jews as their national law; considering the separation of the people into two kingdoms, which was contrary to it, and the frequent occurrence of idolatrous kings, during whose reigns it must, if it existed, have been in abeyance. In the time of Josiah, as we have seen, "the Book of the Law" was generally unknown; and the apparently accidental discovery of such a book (less than twenty years, as computed, before the commencement of the Captivity) is represented as a momentous event leading to the reestablishment of the national religion.

It is to be observed, that these obvious facts are not adduced to disprove the antiquity of the Levitical Law; they are only brought forward to show, that no proof of its being derived from Moses can be founded on the supposition, that it was the national law of the Jews from the time of Moses. Of this supposition no satisfactory evidence exists; for, as has been remarked, we cannot rely on the historical books written after the Captivity, when the Levitical Law was in operation; for these books were, to all appearance, conformed to the opinions and feelings of this later time. But there is not only a want of satisfactory evidence in proof of the supposition; there is, beside the leading facts that have been mentioned, other direct evidence to the contrary, to which we will now advert.

so, this work cannot be considered as trustworthy, where it varies from the earlier historians, or adds to their accounts.

In the first part of his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus could have had no other good authority, than the books of the Old Testament. His work, therefore, affords an example of the license with which a Jewish historian might remodel and add to the history of his countrymen; and we have no reason to be surprised, if we find a similar character in the earlier author of the *Chronicles*.

* Among the many similar facts, which characterize the *Book of Chronicles* as a work adapted to the opinions and feelings of the Jews after the Captivity, when the Levitical Law was established, it may be observed that it omits all mention of the idolatry of Solomon.

The author of the Book of Kings relates, that after the discovery of the Book of the Law, in the reign of Josiah, a passover was celebrated in Jerusalem, and adds; "Such a passover had not been kept from the days of the Judges, who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah."* With the exception of what is found in the Pentateuch itself, this is the only mention of the keeping of a passover in any historical book of earlier date than the Chronicles; nor is there in the Prophets who wrote before the Captivity, any distinct allusion to what afterwards became the great national festival. If the writer of the Book of Kings meant to say, that so splendid a passover had not been celebrated before, not even in the days of Solomon, this would be almost equivalent to saying, that no passover had been celebrated at all. If his meaning were, that the rites of the ceremonial Law were more strictly observed than they had been before, the remark must imply, that they were then for the first time fully observed since the days of the Judges.

In the Book of Nehemiah, written more than a thousand years after the death of Moses, there is a mention of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles;† and, in speaking of it, the writer says, "Since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day had not the children of Israel done so." "We see," says the learned Joseph Mede,‡ "how expressly this Feast of Tabernacles was commanded yearly to be observed. Nevertheless, which is past all belief, it was never kept, at least in this main circumstance of *dwelling in booths* from the time of Joshua till after their return from Captivity." Le Clerc§ remarks, that "this law [the law respecting the Feast of Tabernacles] was neither obscure nor hard to be observed. But, as I have often said, the laws of Moses were never accurately observed." The national festivals, appointed by a ceremonial law, are of all its ordinances the least likely to be neglected.

The writer of the Book of Chronicles himself gives us to understand,|| that the seventy years of the Captivity answered to seventy Sabbatical years which had not been kept. If, as is implied in what is said, the

* 2 Kings xxiii. 22.

† Nehemiah, ch. viii. Comp. Ezra iii. 4-6, which I suppose to relate to the same celebration.

‡ Discourse xlviii. Works, p. 268. Ed. 1679.

§ Comment. in loc.

|| 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

Sabbatical year had not been observed for between four and five centuries preceding the Captivity, that is, for more than five centuries before the time of the writer, there is little reason to believe that any evidence then existed of its ever having been observed. With the Sabbatical years, the years of Jubilee were intimately connected, and if there were no Sabbatical years, we cannot reasonably suppose that there were any years of Jubilee. Yet the laws regarding the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee are among the most important of those concerning the rights of property, and, at the same time, are represented to have been intimately interwoven with the theocratical government of the Jews, as implying a periodical miracle.

According to a law in Leviticus,* it was enjoined under a severe penalty, that sacrifices should be offered only where the Tabernacle was placed. According to another law in Deuteronomy,† after the Jews were established in Palestine, one place of national worship was to be designated, where alone sacrifices were to be offered. This one place was to be considered as the habitation of Jehovah, where alone the people were to seek him and come before him. These laws are apparently fundamental among those relating to the public worship. There is a narrative in the Book of Joshua,‡ according to which their obligation was recognised. But it does not appear elsewhere from the early Jewish history, extending down to the building of Solomon's temple, that such laws existed. On the contrary, altars were raised and sacrifices offered by holy men in various places, and in places where the Tabernacle was not; and such facts are related without censure by the historian.

Thus, for example.—In the first chapter of the first book of Samuel, we find the Tabernacle and the Ark, with Eli and his sons, at Shiloh. Here was the house of Jehovah. The Ark being taken, and afterwards restored, by the Philistines, it was left at Kirjath-jearim, where Eleazar, the son of Abinadab, was consecrated to keep it. Here it appears to have been suffered to remain, separated from the Tabernacle, for the greater part of the time, during nearly half a century, till David removed it to Jerusalem. At one period, during this interval, it appears,§ that the Tabernacle, with priests, was at Nob, where undoubtedly sacrifices were offered. Meanwhile, Samuel, the prophet of Jehovah,

* Ch. xvii. 3-9.

† Ch. xxii. 10-31.

‡ Ch. xii. 2-14.

§ 1 Samuel, chh. xxi. xxii.

called the people together before the Lord at Mizpeh, and, though not a priest, offered a burnt-offering.* He built an altar to Jehovah at Ramah, the place of his residence.† He assisted at a sacrifice on a high place, somewhere in the land of Zuph.‡ He proposed to offer sacrifices at Gilgal.§ He again called the people before Jehovah at Mizpeh.|| The people, under his direction, reacknowledged Saul as king before Jehovah at Gilgal, where they offered peace-offerings.¶ Bethel was another place where Jehovah was sought.** And, not to multiply instances unnecessarily, we afterwards find mention of a grandson of Eli, “the Lord’s priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod.”††

The author of the Book of Kings, speaking of the state of things at the commencement of Solomon’s reign, says,‡‡ “The people sacrificed on high places ; because there was no house built to the Lord until these days.” “Although,” says Le Clerc,§§ “according to the law in Leviticus, sacrifices ought to have been offered only where the Tabernacle was placed, yet that law had not hitherto been observed, nor was this imputed to the people as an offence.” Solomon himself, it is related, “went to sacrifice at Gibeon ; for that was the great high place ;” and so far, according to the narrative, was his conduct from being blameable, that the Lord there gave him the choice of whatever blessings he might desire.

It is true, that in relation to these facts, and others of the same kind, it may be said, that we cannot infer that a law is not extant from the circumstance of its not being obeyed ; that all laws are, more or less, disregarded and transgressed ; that Moses was often disobeyed in his lifetime, and that, therefore, the Levitical Law may have existed, and may have proceeded from Moses, though it was disobeyed in all the instances that have been mentioned. The force of these general remarks is, however, invalidated, when we consider that the instances of supposed disobedience relate to ordinances most likely to be observed, as those concerning the celebration of festivals ; to statutes essentially affecting the rights of property, and sanctioned by the promise of a regular interposition of God,¶¶ as those concerning the Sabbatical year and the

* 1 Samuel, ch vii. 5-9.

† Ibid. ix. 5, 12, 13.

|| Ibid. x. 17.

** Ibid. x. 3.

†† 1 Kings iii. 2.

¶¶ “And if ye ask, What shall we eat during the seventh year, seeing we must

† Ibid. vii. 17.

§ Ibid. x. 8.

¶ Ibid. xi. 15.

†† Ibid. xiv. 3.

§§ Comment. in loc.

Jubilee; and to laws apparently fundamental in the national worship, as those directing a single place to be fixed upon for the celebration of its rites; and, we may add, though the fact has not been dwelt upon before, those appointing the priests to be the sole ministers in offering sacrifices. The case becomes more striking, when we find that these laws, supposing them in being, were not only disregarded, but disregarded without censure, by men who are represented as having been highly favored by the Lord.

But it is to be kept in mind, that it is not the proper purpose of these remarks directly to prove, that the Levitical Law was not given by Moses. Perhaps the supposition, that it was given by Moses, may be reconcilable with all the facts that have been stated. The purpose of the preceding remarks has merely been to show, that the supposed fact, that the Levitical Law in its present state was from the time of Moses the national Law of the Jews, cannot be rendered probable; and, therefore, that this supposed fact can afford no proof toward establishing the proposition, that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.

From the examination we have gone through of the books of the Old Testament, it may appear, that the existence of the Pentateuch, as we now possess it, cannot be traced, by any historical evidence, beyond the return of the Jews from their Captivity. According to a Jewish tradition before quoted,* they possessed on their return no copy of the Pentateuch. This tradition flattered none of their prejudices concerning it, and no national feeling; and this circumstance affords some presumption, that it was founded on truth. It is such a tradition as might naturally arise, if the compilation and fashioning of the Pentateuch were subsequent to the Captivity; and one of which no account can be given, if this were not the fact.

If, indeed, the Pentateuch were not written by Moses, perhaps we cannot with probability assign to it, in its present form, an earlier date than some time after the return of the Jews from their Captivity. When restored to Palestine, their national polity was to be reestablished; they were again to be formed into a state. To effect this end, it was

not sow nor gather in our increase? I answer, I will command by blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth produce for three years." Leviticus xxv. 20, 21.

* See pp. 427-429.

requisite that a written code of laws should be provided. In forming such a code their ancient laws would naturally be revived. Some, perhaps, were inserted, of which only a traditionary story existed, and which, it is not probable, ever had been, or ever were subsequently, observed; such, for example, as the law respecting the Sabbatical year.* New laws, we may suppose, were added to the old; and ceremonies, there is little doubt, were multiplied. At the same time, a strong national feeling must have revived among the Jews, together with a sense of their peculiar relation to God. The history of that dispensation which allied them to God would thus become an object of great interest. All traditions concerning it, written and oral, would be sought out and preserved. The laws of the nation would be ascribed, as far as possible, to their divinely-commissioned Lawgiver; and for this it is not unlikely that some remaining book or books of their ancient laws, as well as the current of tradition, afforded abundant pretence. Thus, from written documents, and oral traditions, we may suppose the Pentateuch to have been compiled by some of those who held the highest

* I, of course, attach no credit to the story of Josephus (*Antiq. Jud. Lib. xi. cap. 8. § 5*) respecting the remission of the tribute of every seventh year, obtained by the Jews from Alexander, which he apparently means to imply was on account of their observance of the Sabbatical years. His whole narrative concerning Alexander's interview with the Jewish high-priest, and of his favor to the Jewish nation, is unquestionably fabulous. It shows this character on its very face; and it has been made evident by Moyle, and others, that it will bear no critical examination. See Moyle's *Correspondence with Prideaux*, in the second volume of his *Works*, p. 26, seqq. Mitford's *History of Greece*, ch. xlviii. § 4. note 16.—Mitford, through some mistake, says that the story is told also "in the book of Maccabees."

Josephus is not a writer to be trusted in any questionable case. It may be worth while to produce a single other illustration of his character, in a matter of some curiosity, which has not, so far as I know, been before brought to notice. Making a computation from the number of lambs sacrificed at the passover, he seems to imply, that the number of Jews who had assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the passover, and who were shut up in the city when besieged by Titus, was more than two millions and a half. But, putting aside this larger number, he expressly asserts, that those who *perished* in the siege were eleven hundred thousand. (*De Bello Jud. Lib. vi. c. 9.*) The walls of the city, he elsewhere says (*Ibid. Lib. v. c. 5. § 3*), were thirty-three stadia in circumference. They, therefore, included less than one square mile. But a square mile, if levelled, and free from buildings and thoroughfares, would have afforded for each of the eleven hundred thousand persons, for himself, his furniture, utensils, provisions, and arms, a space of but a little more than five feet square.

authority in the new state. Such a book, or rather, such a collection of books, under the circumstances of the time, and with the excited feelings of the people, would be readily received. If some fabrications proceeded from the compilers, we should be slow, considering the state of ancient morality, and the loose notions of truth then prevailing, to bring this as a very grave charge against them. That the books were originally ascribed to Moses as their author is highly improbable; for, if their compilers had had any intention of representing him as their author, they would naturally have made him speak in the first person, and they would not have introduced the various passages which, it is obvious, at the first glance, that he could not have written, as, for example, the account of his own death. But the Pentateuch was called "the Book of Moses;" and in this, as in numberless other cases, the ambiguity of language may have led into error. This title, meaning a book containing the history and laws of Moses, might easily, in process of time, in an uncritical age and nation, come to be interpreted as signifying a book written by Moses. The belief, that he was the author of the whole of the Pentateuch was undoubtedly greatly facilitated by the fact, that he is represented in it as having committed much or the whole of the Levitical Law to writing, and by the readiness with which a supposition would be admitted, which ascribed a book of such a character to the inspired Lawgiver of the nation.

Such may have been the origin of the Pentateuch, supposing it not to be the work of Moses. But it is to be recollected, that the main question before us is not, whether this particular hypothesis concerning its formation be probable, but whether it was written by Moses. In support of the proposition, that he was its author, there is, as we have seen, properly speaking, no historical evidence. In all common cases this fact would be decisive of the question; since it would be wholly unreasonable to ascribe a work to a particular author, when we have no evidence that it was ascribed to him before a thousand years after his death. Whether this case be an extraordinary one, to which peculiar proof is applicable, is a question to which we shall hereafter attend, so far as is necessary. But it may here be recollected, that in our search for historical evidence, we have not only seen that such evidence is wanting, but have found reasons for believing that the books in question were not written by Moses. For it is not credible that these books, if written by Moses, and carrying with them the authority of God,

should not have been appealed to by the prophets, the public teachers of the religion of God, who ought to have made them the basis of their instructions. Nor is it credible, that they should have come so near perishing, as to be saved only by a providential discovery, just before the nation fell into ruin and captivity. The tradition of the Jews, that no copy of them was extant on the return of the nation from their Captivity, favours much more the supposition, that they had their origin after that event, than the supposition which ascribes them to Moses. And if it appear, that before that event fundamental ordinances of the Levitical Law were not observed, and even that individuals specially favoured by Heaven acted contrary to them without censure from God or man, it affords a presumption, more or less strong, that the Levitical Law had not God for its author, nor Moses for the organ of its communication.

SECTION IV.

Some general Considerations respecting the Authorship of the Pentateuch.

It may appear, then, from what has been said, that there is no historical evidence, that the Pentateuch was written by Moses; but, on the contrary, that the Jewish history affords proof that he was not its author. We will now pass to some general considerations by which the same conclusion seems to be established.

I. According to the common computation Moses lived in the fifteenth century before Christ. Such, however, I conceive to be the uncertainty of the early Jewish history and chronology, that no approach to accuracy can be made in fixing the time when he lived. But, though it may have been earlier, it, probably, was not much later than the period just mentioned; and in assuming this as correct we shall commit no error which will affect our reasoning.

There is, then, no satisfactory evidence that alphabetical writing was known at this period. If known to others, it is improbable that it was known to the Hebrews. And, in any case, there is no reason to suppose, that they were so familiar with its use, that a book, and especially that five such books as compose the Pentateuch, might have been written for their instruction. Such books are not written except for a

people among whom there are many readers. The injunctions, likewise, respecting the use of writing in the Pentateuch,* imply that the Jews, at the time when they were given, were familiarly acquainted with it; and so also does the reference, which it contains, to another book, "The Book of the Wars of the Lord,"† as already in existence.

But it must have been long after the first rudiments of alphabetical writing had been attained, before the invention was brought to a state so nearly complete, as that in which it appears in the Hebrew alphabet. It must have been a still longer time, before an acquaintance with it had become so common, as to lead to its use for the purpose of communicating instruction by books. Probably it was first used in inscriptions, and in committing to writing compositions principally metrical, which had already become familiar by oral tradition. In the latter case, the intended significance of the newly-discovered signs being already known, they would be easily deciphered, and the art of reading would thus be gradually spread. Books, like those which form the Pentateuch, in prose, and in a style so well constructed, must have been comparatively a very late result of the invention. But, if we suppose Moses to have been the author of the Pentateuch, we must suppose, that before his time the art of writing was in common use, and the consequent demand for the materials employed in it so great, as to render them of very easy acquisition; for Moses must either have provided himself prospectively with a large store of them in the haste of his departure from Egypt, or have afterwards obtained them in the deserts of Arabia. But for a long time after the supposed date of the Pentateuch we find no proof of the existence of a book, or even of an inscription, in proper alphabetical characters among the nations by whom the Hebrews were surrounded.

The descendants of Jacob, according to their history, resided not less than two hundred and fifteen years in Egypt. During this time they could not have learned alphabetical writing from the Egyptians; for the mode of representing ideas to the eye, which the Egyptians employed till a period long subsequent, was widely different from the alphabetical writing of the Hebrews. Nor is it probable, that the descendants of Jacob, who were first shepherds and then slaves in Egypt, were the inventors of the art. If they were acquainted with it, they must, it would seem, have brought it with them into the country. But we

* Deut. vi. 9; xi. 20; xxiv. 1.

† Numbers xxi. 14.

can hardly suppose, that it was invented, or acquired except by tradition, in the family of Isaac, or in that of Jacob before his residence in Egypt, engaged as they both were in agriculture and the care of cattle. We must then go back to Abraham at least for what traditionary knowledge of it his descendants in Egypt may be supposed to have possessed. But it would be idle to argue against the supposition, that alphabetical writing was known in the time of Abraham.

II. We proceed to another consideration. The vocabulary and style of the Pentateuch cannot have been the vocabulary and style of Moses. There is no important difference between the Hebrew of the Pentateuch and that of the other books of the Old Testament, written before the reestablishment of the Jews in Palestine after their Captivity. But from the time of Moses to this event was an interval of about nine hundred or a thousand years. Every other language, the history of which we can trace, if it have continued a living language, has undergone great changes during the same or a shorter period; as, for instance, the English, during the four centuries and a half since the days of Wicliff and Chaucer, and the Latin, in a still shorter interval between the laws of the Twelve Tables and the time of Cicero. But the language of the Israelites was peculiarly exposed to change during the long period of its existence as a spoken tongue after the time of Moses. Its vocabulary, never copious, must have been originally barren; accommodated to the wants of a people having but a narrow sphere of thought. It must not only have enlarged itself to receive the new accession of religious conceptions communicated by Moses; but must have been afterward in a state of continual growth, to adapt itself to the subsequent intellectual developement of the Hebrews, and to the most extraordinary circumstances in which they were placed by the new dispensation. After the death of Moses, they established themselves in a new country, widely different in its natural aspect from Egypt;—from being slaves employed in making bricks, they became accustomed to the use of arms;—they were placed in new relations, and became familiar with new objects and new customs. They were pressed upon by other nations, speaking, as we have reason to believe, languages or dialects different from their own, with whom they intermingled, whose idolatrous rites, and other customs, they sometimes adopted, and to whom, in the earlier part of their history, they were sometimes in servitude. Their engaging

in commerce in the time of Solomon must have had its customary effect to give a new coloring to their speech. Before the time of Samuel, they were wholly without that attention to literature, and that intellectual cultivation, which might have served to fix their language, and certainly had no literary watchfulness to guard against its corruption; nor can we suppose that those habits of mind existed in a high degree during any stage of their history. Under such circumstances a language cannot remain the same for nine or ten centuries. The supposition, that the Pentateuch in its present form was written by Moses, is as untenable as would be the supposition, that some book written in modern English was a composition of the age of Chaucer. The attempts which have been made to point out certain archaisms of style in the Pentateuch, only show that no evidence can be produced of such peculiarity of language as the case requires.* Nor is the existence of those supposed archaisms difficult to be accounted for. The Pentateuch, if not

* In treating of the perfection of the Hebrew language, Leusden, one of the most learned Hebrew scholars of his time, thus writes. "The uniformity of the Hebrew language in all the books of the Old Testament contributes much to its perfection. I have often wondered that there should be so great a correspondence between the Hebrew of all the books of the Old Testament, when we know that they were composed by different men (whose respective styles of writing are often distinguishable), at diverse times, and in diverse places. Should a book be written by different men of the same city, we should perceive for the most part greater differences in it, as respects style or orthography, or some other circumstances, than appear in the whole Old Testament. But let a book be written by a German and by a Frieslander, or let there be an interval of a thousand years between the writers, as there was between many of those of the Old Testament, what a difference of language would appear! He who understood the writing of one might scarcely understand that of the other. Nay, the difference of time and place would render their modes of speech so unlike, that it would be very difficult to apply to them the same rules of grammar and syntax. But in the Old Testament there is so great a uniformity, such a correspondence in orthography and construction, that one might almost think that all the books were written at the same time and in the same place, though by different authors." *Philologus Hebræus*, Diss. xvii. pp. 166, 167.

It is the opinion of Gesenius, the most distinguished Hebrew scholar of our day, that the antiquity of the Hebrew language, *in its present form*, hardly reaches higher than the age of David or Solomon. "Upon the supposition," he says, "that the Pentateuch was a production of the age of Moses, we must indeed carry its existence back to a period considerably more remote. But notwithstanding the learned defenders which that supposition has found in our own age, it can scarcely approve itself to the judgment of an unprejudiced critic. . . . It is a

the work of Moses, was undoubtedly, in great part, a compilation ; and from the preëxisting documents or traditions which formed its basis those few antiquated or peculiar forms of speech might be copied or imitated.

III. In the next place, it may be observed, that the Pentateuch contains passages, which, it is agreed, could not have been written by Moses. Some of them are obvious to every reader ; as, for instance, the account of his own death, and the passage in Genesis,* in which it is said, " These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." But such passages, it is said, do not prove that the Pentateuch was not his work ; they are to be regarded only as additions made to it by some later hand. To this, it may be answered, that there is a presumption, that a work is not to be ascribed to a particular individual, when it contains a considerable number of passages which he obviously could not have written, though this presumption, undoubtedly, may be overborne by opposite evidence. It may be remarked, likewise, that upon the supposition that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch, there would have been a natural reluctance among the Hebrews to making or permitting such useless interpolations ; to thus tampering with a work so venerable, the composition of their inspired lawgiver, recording the very words of God himself ; their infallible directory in religion and morals, and the unalterable code of their civil law. A book thus unique might be expected to escape corruption. During the period concerning which we have satisfactory evidence, that the Pentateuch has been so regarded by the Jews, we know that such interpolations have not been made in it. But

fact, that the language of the Pentateuch fully corresponds with that of the other ancient historical books, and, in the poetical portions, with that of the other poetry of the first age." [Gesenius considers the first age of the Hebrew language as extending to the time when it was corrupted by the influence of the Chaldee in consequence of the Captivity.] " If there was an interval of nearly a thousand years between these writings, as there must have been on the supposition that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, a phenomenon would be presented to which there is nothing parallel in the whole history of language, namely, that the living language of a people, and the circle of their ideas, should remain so unaltered for such a length of time." *Geschichte der Hebräischen Sprache und Schrift* : i. e. *History of the Hebrew Language and Modes of Writing*, § 8.

* Ch. xxxvi. 31.

it is unnecessary to insist on these considerations ; there is another to be attended to. At the time when those supposed interpolations were made, no importance could have been attached to the belief, that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. The necessary effect of such interpolations was to incorporate into the book itself evidence,—false evidence, it may be said, but still evidence, and such as appears at first view decisive,—that the book was not written by him. Those, therefore, by whom the interpolations were introduced could not have attached any importance to a belief, which they took such means to destroy. But to say that no importance was attached to the belief that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, is but saying in other words, that it did not exist ; for it is impossible, if the belief existed, that it should not have been considered as essentially affecting the character and authority of the Pentateuch.

IV. There is another consideration. The books of the Pentateuch do not claim to be the work of Moses. They profess to contain his history, but they are not professedly written by him.

The fact has been regarded as of little weight ; because in other historical works, as in those of Cæsar and Clarendon, the author has spoken of himself in the third person. But this is a deviation from common usage and the natural mode of expression, occasioned by some particular motive. It may be adopted by a writer in order to avoid an air of arrogance or vanity ; or to give the appearance of impartiality to his history, as if it were unaffected by his personal feelings ; or to place himself under the same point of view with other individuals whom he introduces into his narrative. It is a mode of writing which belongs not to a rude, but to a refined age ; and no probable reason can be assigned, why it should have been adopted by Moses. Such a semblance of modesty would have been wholly unsuitable to his office. As the minister of God to his countrymen, it was his business to speak with authority, to assert his claims to deference, and to place himself without reserve before them, as one whom they were bound to listen to and obey.

But the fact is of much importance under another aspect. Did the Pentateuch assume to be the work of Moses, then, in denying it to be his work, we should be driven to the supposition of intentional fraud. But this would be the supposition not merely of a very gross imposture,

but of an imposture which, as regards such books, ascribed to such an author, was very unlikely to be attempted, and very unlikely to be successful. On the other hand, there is no difficulty in supposing that a series of books might at any time be readily received by the Jews, which, without claiming to be the work of Moses, embodied the traditions respecting their ancient history, and those that had long been gathering round his name, and which referred to him as their author those laws, that had been gradually built up on the basis of his institutions.

SECTION V.

On the Internal Character of the Pentateuch.

THE arguments hitherto adduced do not involve the credibility of the narratives contained in the Pentateuch, or any moral or religious considerations. It is different with those about to be stated.

In judging whether the Pentateuch be the work of Moses, that is, of a writer deserving the highest credit, we must consider whether the narratives it contains are in themselves credible. These narratives may be divided into two classes, those which relate to natural and those which relate to supernatural events. As regards either class, it may be sufficient to direct attention to the subject, and then leave it to every one's private investigation and thought. Of many examples a few may be adduced, which seem to show that the history cannot be regarded as authentic, nor as the work of a contemporary of the supposed events which it narrates. We will first attend to those narratives which concern events not miraculous.

I. The number of fighting men among the Israelites ("every male from twenty years old and upward"), immediately after their leaving Egypt, is said to have been more than six hundred thousand; the numbers of each tribe being particularly given.* This statement of the whole sum of the fighting men is repeatedly made.† It included none from the tribe of Levi, who did not go forth to war. The whole number

* Numbers i. 19-46.

† Numbers ii. 32; xi. 21; xxvi. 51. Exod. xii. 37; xxxviii. 26.

of the Israelites, therefore, at the time of their leaving Egypt, cannot be estimated at less than two millions and a half. More than eighty years before the time of their departure, a king of Egypt is represented as saying, "Lo ! the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we." The land of Egypt is said to have been filled with them.* Let us consider this account of their numbers.

The Israelites who established themselves in Egypt, that is, Jacob and his descendants, are stated, in the books of Genesis and Exodus, to have been seventy in number.† To these, in reckoning the progenitors of the nation, must be added the wives of his sons and grandsons. Their number is uncertain, but, as only two of his grandsons are mentioned as having children at this time, if we assume that the progenitors of the Israelites amounted to two hundred, the whole error in our estimate must be through excess. No one who receives the accounts in Genesis and Exodus, as authentic, can suppose that the number was greater.

How long, then, did the Israelites remain in Egypt? There are two different opinions on the subject ; according to one of which, the period of their residence was two hundred and fifteen years, and according to the other, four hundred and thirty. Passing over some critical considerations, which bear upon the question, there are others that may enable us to form a judgment respecting it. It cannot be believed, that the Israelites would have remained a distinct people among the Egyptians for four hundred and thirty years. Four hundred and thirty years are a sixth part of that period, beyond which darkness and uncertainty settle upon the whole history of mankind. When we look back to the changes that have taken place since the commencement of the fifteenth century of our era, we may have some notion of what is likely to occur during such a length of time. After the Jews had been separated by God from the rest of men through the ministry of Moses, their religion might prevent them from mixing with other nations. But while they were in Egypt there was no permanent obstacle to their becoming incorporated with the Egyptians as one people ; and in the

* Exod. i. 7, 9.

† Genesis xli. 5-27. Exodus i. 5. Stephen, in his speech (Acts vii. 14), says "seventy five," following the Septuagint. It has been supposed, that to make this number the five grandsons of Joseph, who were born after the establishment of Jacob's family in Egypt, are added.

nature of things such an incorporation would have taken place in the course of four centuries.

Upon their leaving Egypt, we find that all the descendants of each of the twelve sons of Jacob could severally be referred to their respective progenitors. The nation could readily be divided into twelve tribes. But we can hardly suppose this to have been possible after an interval of four centuries. When established in Canaan, there may have been particular reasons for their preserving their family genealogies, but there was none before. They were in the same circumstances in this respect as the generality of men in other nations; and in what other nation have the individuals who compose it been able to trace back their genealogy for four hundred years, each to a particular son of a common ancestor?

But the genealogy of Moses may alone seem decisive of the question. Moses, on his mother's side, is stated to have been the grandson of Levi. "The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, a daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram, Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam, their sister." * It has been suggested, that by "a daughter of Levi" may be meant nothing more than "a woman of the tribe of Levi." But the probability of this interpretation may be tested by substituting the latter words for the former, in the passage before us: "The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, a woman of the tribe of Levi, whom her mother bore to Levi in Egypt." According to the explanation proposed, the last clause is worse than a mere useless repetition. It perplexes the sense. The assertion, that "the mother of Jochebed bore her to Levi" can mean only what the writer is supposed to have just said, that Jochebed *was of the tribe of Levi*; and the addition, that she bore her "in Egypt," becomes altogether idle. But if there were any doubt about the meaning of this passage, it would be settled by another in Exodus,† where it is said, that Kohath was the son of Levi, and that Amram was the son of Kohath, and thus the grandson of Levi; and that "Amram took him to wife Jochebed, his father's sister," who was consequently Levi's daughter, "and she bare him Aaron and Moses." The statement of the same fact, that Jochebed, the mother of Moses, was the daughter of Levi, in these two different forms, can leave no question as to the meaning of the writer. Yet about eighty years before the Israelites

* Numbers xxvi. 59.

† Ch. vi. 16-20.

left Egypt, Jochebed was capable of bearing children ; for Moses is said to have been eighty years old when he spoke to Pharaoh.* As Moses was on his mother's side the grandson of Levi, so he was on his father's side the grandson of Kohath, who was born before the Israelites entered Egypt.† Upon the supposition, that the Pentateuch was written by him, it is to be recollected that this is his own account of his progenitors. It follows from it, that the residence of the Israelites in Egypt could not have extended to four hundred and thirty years ; and that, in choosing between this and two hundred and fifteen, we must take the smaller number. One cannot, indeed, very plausibly reconcile the genealogy of Moses even with the shorter period.

Assuming, then, the period of two hundred and fifteen years, we may calculate the probable increase of two hundred individuals during this time. It must be under favorable circumstances, that they would, through such a period, double their numbers once in twenty-five years. But the Israelites were, according to the account in Exodus, placed in circumstances very unfavorable to their increase during the last eighty years of their residence in Egypt ; the king having ordered their male children to be destroyed, and they themselves being reduced to miserable servitude. Supposing them, however, to have been originally two hundred individuals, and to have increased at the rate just mentioned, their numbers, upon leaving Egypt, would have amounted to something less than a hundred thousand, instead of two millions and a half.

But whatever was the rate of increase among the Israelites, no reason can be given why they should have multiplied faster than the Egyptians. That the rate of increase of the former should so vastly exceed that of the latter, as it must have done according to the history in the Pentateuch, is incredible. If the Israelites, at the time of their departure, amounted to two millions and a half, their original number had been increased twelve thousand five hundred times ; if it amounted to a hundred thousand, it had been increased five hundred times. But if we suppose merely a million of inhabitants in Egypt at the time when the Israelites entered it, then any thing approximating to the lowest rate of increase for the whole population of which they made a part, is obviously out of the question. The writer of the Pentateuch, however, represents a single family of sixty-eight male members as entering one of the principal ancient kingdoms, and in a certain time,—

* Exodus vii. 7.

† Genesis xlii. 11.

whether two hundred, or four hundred, years, is here unimportant—becoming formidable through their numbers to the other inhabitants of the country, of the population of which it would be unreasonable to suppose that they originally formed a ten thousandth part.

II. There is much in the history of the Israelites, which becomes incredible on the supposition, that their number approached to what it is represented to have been. When, according to the account, the two or three millions of Israelites left Egypt, they were accompanied by “a mixed multitude who went along with them, and flocks and herds, even an abundance of cattle.”* Yet this immense body is represented as having been collected, arrayed, and put in motion in a single day, in consequence of a hasty command of Pharaoh given the preceding night.† In what time could this nation of men, women, and children, with all their sick and aged, with their domestic animals, and their necessary baggage, have defiled, in the face of any enemy, through the Red Sea? According to the history it was done in a single night. How long must it have taken such a multitude of men and cattle to quench the thirst of which they were perishing at the waters of Marah, or by those which gushed from the rock of Horeb? What extent of territory must have been covered by two or three millions of men encamped in tents among the rocky defiles, the mountainous and broken country around Sinai, or along the eastern shore of the Red Sea? From the history we should receive the impression, that they were

* Exodus xii. 38.

† Exodus xii. Numbers xxxiii. 3. The passover was slain on the fourteenth day of the month, which, according to the Jewish computation, ended at sunset. At midnight, that is, on the fifteenth day, the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed. The same night Pharaoh issued his order for the departure of the Israelites; and during the fifteenth day the Israelites were on their march. I should not mention these particulars, which are obvious in the passages referred to, had I not observed an oversight in the valuable “Biblical Researches” of Professor Robinson, to which he seems to have been unconsciously led by an indistinct sense of the utter incredibility of the narrative as actually given. He says (Vol. i. p. 80), “From the time when Pharaoh dismissed Moses and Aaron in the night of [following] the fourteenth day of the month (according to the Jewish reckoning), until the morning of the fifteenth day, when the people set off, there was an interval of some thirty hours.” Between some time after the midnight which followed the fourteenth day of the month, and the morning of the fifteenth, there could have been an interval of but a very few hours.

a body capable of being readily assembled, and orally addressed by Moses or Aaron; a body which might all be put in motion in the morning, accomplish a day's journey, and at night encamp at a particular place; as at "Elim, where there were twelve wells of water, and they encamped there by the waters."*

III. The number of the Israelites, we are told, had alarmed one of the kings of Egypt. Before the birth of Moses, that is, about eighty years before the Israelites left Egypt, or one hundred and thirty-five after the family of sixty-eight males entered it, the king is represented as saying; "Lo the people of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we; come, let us wisely prevent their multiplying."† Being alarmed at their numbers, he resolved to provoke their most deadly and desperate hatred. He "made their lives bitter" by reducing them to slavery; and issued an order for the destruction of all their male children. After an unsuccessful attempt fully to effect his latter purpose, this order is said to have assumed the following horrible form, "Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river."‡ To outrage to the utmost a formidable nation, to exercise upon it an extravagance of cruelty which no tribe of men, however feeble, would tamely endure, virtually to declare a war of extermination upon the Israelites, in the most odious form which war could assume, are the expedients that Pharaoh is represented as adopting through dread of their enmity. Nor is this the most extraordinary part of the history. The Israelites, as far as appears from it, submitted without resistance to be made slaves, and to have their infants murdered as a matter of common usage. The voice of human nature pronounces this to be impossible. No people was ever so far degraded below the brutes, who expose their own lives in defence of their young.

IV. But the king is represented as, at the same time, in dread of their power and fearful lest they should withdraw themselves from Egypt; "lest they should join his enemies, and by force of arms leave the country;" § and, according to the narrative, one of his successors considered their remaining in Egypt as of so much importance, that he manifested

* Exodus xv. 27.

† Exodus i. 22.

‡ Exodus i. 9, 10.

§ Exodus i. 10.

the most insane obstinacy in refusing to permit their departure. It must have been only for their value as slaves, that the kings of Egypt were so desirous to keep the Hebrews in their land. But how is this to be reconciled with an order for the destruction of their male children,—that is, for the gradual extermination of those Hebrew slaves, who were such valuable property, that supernatural inflictions of the most terrible kind were to be endured, or the hazard of them encountered, rather than that they should be suffered to quit the country?

V. When at last an order for their departure was extorted, we find them represented as leaving the country in such haste, that they “took their unleavened dough in the kneading vessels, wrapped up in their garments upon their shoulders;” and during their first day’s journey “baked unleavened cakes of the dough;” “for they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry; nor had they prepared for themselves any provision.”* As we have before remarked, however, they carried with them “flocks and herds, even an abundance of cattle;” and they carried them into the desert which borders the Red Sea to the west, where no supply of herbage was to be found for their subsistence. Crossing the Red Sea, they commenced their march toward Mount Sinai, through a region of frightful sterility. In this desert they journeyed for three days without water, and, as would appear from the preceding account, without food. At the end of the third day they were furnished with sweet water by a miracle.† What number had perished in the mean time is not told. During their whole journeying and residence along the coast of the Red Sea and in the desert of Sinai, where water for a few travellers is often difficult to be procured, we read of their having a miraculous supply only in one other instance.‡ Their sufferings from hunger, we are told, were great before their arriving at Sinai; and quails and manna were miraculously provided for their support.§ Their cattle, of course, had perished, or been killed. The manna was continued for the whole forty years of their journeyings till they came “to an inhabited land.” Yet before quitting their encampment around Sinai, they are again described as having an abundance of cattle for sacrifices, and of lambs for the passover, flour, oil, and wine, and a pro-

* Exodus xii. 34, 39.

† Exod. xv. 22-25.

‡ At Horeb. Exod. xvii. 1, seqq.

§ Exod. xvi.

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

* Departing from Mount Sinai to march through "a wilderness," † the people complained and wept, "Will give us flesh to eat;" and were again miraculously supplied with quails.‡ After this their sufferings from want of water, as their cattle are still alive; for they thus expostulate with Aaron; "Why have ye brought the people of God into this wilderness where both ourselves and our cattle must die?" § Thus the preservation of the Israelites, and not these only, but "a mixed multitude who went with them," || are represented as remaining forty years in deserts, where they must have perished, but for a constant miraculous supply of food; and as having at the same time herds of cattle, which, in their longings after flesh, they refrained from eating. The food of their cattle must also have been furnished by some astonishing miracle, of which the historian has supplied no account. Equally for men and beasts an uninterrupted miraculous supply of water was necessary; but the supposition, that such an uninterrupted supply was afforded, is precluded by the circumstance, that four particular cases are specified in which it was given." ¶ The Jewish Rabbis, though in general not apt to startle at absurdities, perceived this deficiency in their history, and endeavoured to supply it by a tradition, alluded to by St. Paul, ** that the rock of Horeb, or the water which gushed from it, followed the Israelites in their wanderings.

VI. An incongruity, only less glaring, is found in the accounts of the wealth possessed by the Israelites, while encamped around Sinai, in gold, silver, brass, precious stones, fine linen of different colors, boards of setim wood, aromatics, spices, and various other articles of luxury, and of their skill in different arts.†† They could have acquired neither their wealth nor their skill by their employment as slaves in

* Exod. Ch. xxiv. 5. Ch. xxix. Ch. xxx. 23, seqq. Leviticus, Chh. viii. ix. Numbers, Ch. iii. 41, 45. Ch. vii. Ch. ix. 2-14, &c.

† Deut. i. 19.

‡ Numbers, Ch. xi.

§ Numbers xx. 4.

|| Exod. xii. 38. Numbers xi. 4.

¶ At Marah, Exod. xv. 23, seqq. At Horeb, Exod. xvii. 1, seqq. At Meribah, Numbers xx. 2, seqq. And at Beer, Numbers xxi. 16, seqq.

** 1 Cor. x. 4. On which passage see Wetstein's note.

†† xxv. xxviii. Chh. xxx.,-xxxi. Ch. xxxii. vv. 2-4, 20, 24.

Egypt in the making of bricks.* Their skill, it may be said, was miraculously conferred. But this solution will not apply to the casting of the golden calf by Aaron.† A part of their wealth, it may be said, that they procured from the Egyptians, from whom, before leaving Egypt, they asked and obtained “utensils of silver, utensils of gold, and raiment.”‡ The story of “their spoiling of the Egyptians,” in consequence of a divine direction, presents difficulties quite as serious as those which it may be brought forward to remove. But, however great may have been the generosity of the Egyptians, in gifts of gold and silver utensils and raiment, it will account only for a part of the wealth of the Israelites, much of which consisted in other stores. Nor is any explanation to be given, why the Israelites, who were removing such a profusion of articles of luxury into the desert, and who consequently had provided means for the conveyance of them, should have borne away in the hurry of their departure their yet unleavened dough

* In speaking of the account of the construction of the tabernacle, Dr. Priestley says (“Notes on Scripture,” *Exod.* xxxvi. 5), “In short, there is no art known to the ancients, a thousand years after this time, with which the Israelites do not appear to have been well acquainted.” It is strange, that a man of so much acuteness as Dr. Priestley should have written such a sentence without perceiving its obvious bearing on the credibility of the history. The coincidence between his mention of “a thousand years after the time” of Moses, and the not improbable date of the final compilation of the Pentateuch, is perhaps worthy of notice.—We are told, in the book of Samuel, that some centuries after the period when the Israelites are represented as so skilful in the arts, “there was no smith in Israel,” so that they had neither swords nor spears; and “all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock.” (1 Samuel xiii. 19-22.)

† Exodus xxxii.—The opinion entertained by some commentators, that Aaron carved the image in wood, and then overlaid it with gold, which is thought to lighten the difficulties attending the narrative, seems to be inconsistent with its being called a molten calf, and directly contrary to what Aaron is made to say (v. 24), “Then I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf.”

‡ Exodus iii. 21, 22; xi. 2; xii. 35, 36. The common version says, that the Israelites “borrowed” of the Egyptians, and the Egyptians “lent” them what they asked for. If they “borrowed,” it was with a promise of returning, expressed or implied. But it is far from certain, that the words in the original correspond to those terms, the use of which I have, therefore, avoided. The one party asked as presents, it has been said, and the other party gave, gold and silver utensils (not jewels), and raiment. The causes which have been assigned for this extraordinary liberality of the Egyptians are such, it seems to me, as will bear no discussion.

in the kneading-vessels upon their shoulders, and should have had no opportunity to provide any store of provisions for their own sustenance. If the Israelites possessed all those articles in the desert, they had, as I have said, means of transporting them. But such does not appear to have been the case. The camel is the only beast of burden which could have been used; and there is no mention of their possessing camels.

VII. Concerning the inhabitants of Palestine, the Israelites are said to have been told by Moses; "Ye may not destroy them at once, lest the wild beasts increase upon you." They were, therefore, to be expelled "by little and little," in proportion to the gradual increase of the Hebrews.* These nations, however, would not have waited in peace to be extirpated at the convenience of their enemies; and, if engaged with them in a war of extermination, they would have been more formidable than the wild beasts. The mention of the latter is another strange circumstance. Palestine, at the time when it was invaded by the Hebrews, is described as being inhabited by nations greater and more powerful than they (though their numbers had caused fear to the Egyptians), as having in it large cities "walled up to heaven," and as being highly cultivated, "flowing with milk and honey."† The whole extent of Palestine is less than two hundred miles in length, and a hundred in average breadth. Supposing the Israelites to have been the sole inhabitants of so small a territory, lately so populous, it would not have required that their numbers should be two millions and a half, nor more than a tenth part of two millions and a half, to secure them from the ravages of wild beasts.

The history contained in the Pentateuch is not to be judged of only by the few examples of apparent impossibilities, or inconsistencies, which I have specified,—not selected, except, indeed, with reference to their being such as might be rendered obvious in a few words. The attempts to explain the Pentateuch as authentic history present a constant struggle with difficulties. The commentator is continually called upon to soften down the features of what seems incredible, and to create hypotheses by which he may reduce what looks like a fabulous tradition

* Deut. vii. 22. Exod. xxiii. 29, 30.

† Exod. iii. 8. Numbers xiii. 27, 28. Deut. viii. 7-9; ix. 1, &c.

from a remote age, to a form that may appear consistent with the character of God, the nature of man, and the circumstances of the individuals who are brought into view. As regards this sort of explanation, it is to be remarked, that we may sometimes admit a conjecture possible, though not in itself probable, to explain a difficulty in a history of established credit; but that a history cannot be trustworthy, which demands a constant succession of such conjectures.

Before speaking of the narratives of supernatural events, there is one general characteristic of the history, its representation of the conduct and character of the Israelites, too important to be wholly passed over. It must strike every attentive reader, that he is conversant throughout with men whose characters he cannot enter into, whose states of mind he cannot comprehend, who are continually acting in a manner different from that in which he himself would act; men with whom he has nothing in common. The history is inconsistent with human nature. We may take, as an example, the conduct ascribed throughout to the Israelites in relation to the Deity. According to the history, they witnessed, for a long succession of years, displays of miraculous power, the most astonishing, the most magnificent, and the most appalling; a power never suspending its operations, but continually displaying itself in the pillar of cloud, and pillar of flame, in visible descents of the Deity, and even in the supply of their daily food. It was announced to them, that they were selected as the peculiar objects of the favor and protection of the Being whose power was thus made known. Great blessings were promised as the reward of obedience, and terrible punishments threatened for disobedience. Under these circumstances the minds of any human beings must have been wholly subdued. Every motive, from the highest to the lowest; duty, gratitude, hope, fear, pride in their wonderful distinction; all good in prospect on the one side, and nothing but destruction on the other; and above all, the visible presence of the Almighty, must have determined them to obedience. Yet the conduct of the Israelites is described to have been such, as to justify the language which Moses is said to have addressed to them a little before his death; "From the day in which ye departed from the land of Egypt, until your arrival at this place, ye have been rebelling against Jehovah."*

* Deut. ix. 7.

Let us now attend to the miraculous part of the history, the manner in which God is described as making himself known to his creatures by acts and words. In some of the conceptions which the Pentateuch presents of the Infinite Being, we perceive, I think, very striking remains of the revelation by Moses, and, as we may reasonably believe, of earlier communications of God to men. The account, for instance, of the Creation, contained in the first chapter of Genesis, appears a monument of magnificent simplicity, when compared with other ancient cosmogonies. The genius of Plato, as displayed in his *Timæus*, shrinks before it. Throughout the Pentateuch are enforced in the strongest manner the fundamental truths of one Supreme Being, who is God alone, of his interest in the concerns of men, and of his moral government. The latter conception, indeed, is obscured by the imperfect notions of morality belonging to the rude ages, during which the traditions now found in the Pentateuch may be supposed to have been moulded into their present form. The idea of the unmingled benevolence of the Deity, that God is Love, that afflictions and punishments flow from his mercy equally with our joys, is not to be found there; but it is an idea to which the human intellect, through the aid of revelation, has attained only in its fullest developement. But when we compare the conceptions of God presented in the Pentateuch with the representations of heathen divinities in the poems of Homer, we shall perceive the immeasurable superiority of the former. In the great precepts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," we find a conception of the foundations of religion and morality, unknown to heathen antiquity. In coming to the Pentateuch we have entered the precincts of true religion, though grotesque shapes are around us, and the heavens are obscured by clouds from which the thunder is rolling.

These remarks respecting the Pentateuch will not appear incongruous with those that follow, if we recollect that its books admit of being viewed in relation to two wholly different standards. If we regard them as a traditionary, erroneous, account of the early revelations of God to men, especially of his revelation through Moses, we may compare their representations of the Deity with the contemporary superstition and idolatry of the heathen world. If we regard them as the work of Moses, and consequently as containing an authentic record of the revelation of God through him, we must compare

those representations with the conceptions of God which Christianity has enabled us to form. Such is the comparison now to be instituted, in pursuing the inquiry whether the books of the Pentateuch were written by Moses.

It is not necessary to dwell on the narratives in Genesis concerning the appearances and acts of God. They evidently imply very rude conceptions of his nature. But there is little doubt among those who have examined the subject, that the Book of Genesis is a compilation of prior accounts, oral or written; and it may be said, that the narratives which it contains had gradually assumed their present form, and that Moses thought it best to retain conceptions and language with which his contemporaries were familiar. But it is to be observed, that when we come to the narrative of facts, of which, if we regard Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, he had personal experience, the character of the history does not improve. There is nothing more strange in the book of Genesis than the narrative in the fourth chapter of Exodus, in which it is related, that after Moses had been solemnly commissioned and sent by God to the Israelites, while "he was on his way, at a lodging-place, Jehovah met him and sought to slay him,"—with all that follows. Respecting this branch of our subject, like the former, it will be necessary to remark particularly only on a few passages, which may serve as representatives of many others.

I. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus, there is the following account. "And Jehovah said to Moses, Come up unto me, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. . . . Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under his feet a pavement of lucid sapphire, clear as the very heavens. And on the chief men of the children of Israel He laid not his hand; and they saw God; and they ate and drank. And Jehovah said to Moses, Come up to me upon the mount, and there remain, and I will give you tables of stone, with the law and commandments which I have written, that thou mayest teach the people. . . . And the glory of Jehovah abode on Mount Sinai, and a cloud covered it for six days; and the seventh day he called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of Jehovah was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the view of the children of Israel. And Moses entered into the midst of the

cloud and ascended the mountain. And Moses was upon the mountain forty days and forty nights. And Jehovah spake to Moses, saying "—

Before proceeding further, let us consider, that according to the history, we are about to listen, as it were, to the very words of God, addressed to that minister with whom he "spoke as man to man." After all this tremendous solemnity of preparation, after having been summoned into the visible presence of the Deity, after having seen God and lived, what must have been the expectation of the elders of Israel respecting the momentous import of the divine communication. Let us imagine that some of their number had formed just and enlarged conceptions of God, and had speculated upon the condition and prospects of mankind. They must have been looking earnestly for some revelation, which would send a stream of light through the darkness that rested upon the world; which would disclose to their erring and suffering race new relations and new hopes; which should raise man in his moral nature nearer to the author of his being; which should be listened to with intense interest, wherever made known, by all human beings in all ages to come. What then was the communication?

"And Jehovah spake to Moses, saying; Tell the children of Israel to bring me an offering. From every one whose heart is willing to give, ye shall take my offering. And these are the offerings which ye shall take from them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and seals' skins, and setim wood, oil for the lamps, aromatics for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and other stones, to be set in the ephod and breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. Ye shall make it according to the pattern of the tabernacle, and all its utensils, which I show thee.

"They shall make an ark of setim wood, two cubits and a half in length, and a cubit and a half in breadth, and a cubit and a half in height; and thou shalt overlay it with pure gold. Within and without shalt thou overlay it; and thou shalt make a moulding of gold about it."

We may stop here; but seven chapters are filled with directions as trivial. So wholly unconnected are they with any moral or religious sentiment, or any truth important or unimportant,—except the melancholy fact of their having been regarded as a divine communication,—that it requires a strong effort to read through with attention these

pretended words of the Infinite Being. The natural tendency of a belief that such words proceeded from Him, whenever this belief prevailed, must have been to draw away the regard of the Jews from all that is worthy of man as a moral and intellectual being, and to fix it on the humblest objects of superstition. It is not to be forgotten, however, that this tendency was strongly counteracted by much of a different character that is to be found in the Pentateuch.

II. But throughout the Pentateuch such accounts of the Supreme Being occur, as may excuse or justify the unfavorable conceptions entertained by the Gnostics of the God of the Jews. It is related, for instance, that he inflicted the most terrible evils upon the Egyptians, solely on account of the mad obstinacy of their despot, from whose tyranny they without doubt were already suffering in common with the Israelites.* But passing over every other, less striking, example of the same kind, we will advert only to the order for the extirpation of the Canaanites; and to the manner in which the Midianitish captives are said to have been treated by the command of Moses, acting as the minister of Jehovah.

The expedition sent against the Midianites, after destroying all the adult males, without the loss, as the history relates, of an individual on the part of the Israelites, brought back the women and children as captives. The history thus proceeds; "And Moses was wroth with the commanders of the host . . . and said, Why have ye saved all the women alive? Lo! they, by the counsel of Balaam, caused the children of Israel to offend Jehovah in the business of Peor, so that there was a plague among the people of Jehovah. Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and every female not a virgin; but the female children that are virgins keep for yourselves."†

If we receive the Pentateuch as authentic, the lot of the female children, who were permitted, certainly not in mercy, to survive the butchery of their mothers, and of every male among the little ones,—the lot, I say, of these female captives may be judged of by the manners of the times, by the habits which the perpetration of such acts must have pro-

* It is not necessary to dwell on the narrative of the "ten plagues of Egypt." Little more, perhaps, can be said than what appears at first sight, to show its improbability; and as little, it seems to me, to remove or palliate this improbability.

† Numbers, Ch. xxxi.

duced in the Israelites, by the law respecting female slaves, given in Deuteronomy,* and by the little probability, that even the conditions of this law would be respected.†

The command for the destruction of the Canaanites is expressed in the following words, remarkable for their comprehensive brevity; "Of the cities of these people thou shalt save nothing alive that breathes."‡ Of the objections to the credibility of the Pentateuch, theologians seem to have particularly selected for answer this command, and to have labored to show, that it is reconcilable with the character of God. It is said, that the destruction of the Canaanites is analogous to those cases in which God appoints a city to be swallowed up by an earthquake, or a nation to be ravaged by a pestilence, without distinction of sex or age. Undoubtedly, the law of nature, that is, the merciful law of God, that all must die, takes effect daily upon many thousands of individuals, old men, women, and infants, as well as those able for war. But this obvious truth does not serve to reconcile us to the present account. The ordinary operations of God's providence are not to be confounded with what is represented to have been a miraculous infliction of his vengeance. According to the history, the extirpation of the

* Ch. xxi. 10, seqq.

† Bishop Watson, however, in his "Apology for the Bible" (Letter III.), says; "I see nothing in this proceeding but good policy combined with mercy." This remark is followed by some ill-advised declamation. The coarse writer (Paine), against whom he professes to argue, had said, that the Midianitish virgins "were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." "Prove this," says the Bishop, "and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it,—a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy." The promised concession is equally liberal and injudicious. As a matter of fair statement, the word "debauchery" is objectionable, from its association with modern manners and sentiments. But, if we receive the Pentateuch as authentic, the difference between the actual lot of the Midianitish virgins, and what it is represented to have been by the use of that word, is very narrow and unsafe ground on which to peril the whole credibility of revealed religion.

It may be said in defence of the Jews, that their conduct toward the Midianites was not more barbarous than that of other ancient nations in their wars with each other. This defence might be admitted, if the massacre, according to the account, had not been perpetrated by the express order of Moses, in opposition to the more humane purpose of the army and its leaders. As the case now stands, this apology implies the proposition, that Moses was commissioned by God to sanction and perpetuate the barbarism of his age.

‡ Deut. xx. 16.

Canaanites was a terrible punishment from God for their abominable vices and idolatry ; but no account can be given, why the Deity should manifest himself to his creatures as inflicting punishment indiscriminately on the innocent and guilty ; as an Oriental despot exterminates a family for the offences of its head. But there is more than this to be considered.

The destruction of the Canaanites is to be regarded not merely as the act of God, if ordered by him, but likewise as the act of those who were the appointed instruments of his will, the chosen people, the sole depositaries of true religion and morals. It is said, that the object of their being appointed the executioners of the decree, was to impress them with the deepest horror of the idolatry and vices of the Canaanites. It is difficult to believe, that any one can give this answer without a strong suspicion of its unsoundness. The effect of their appointment as executioners must have been to convert them into a horde of ferocious and brutal barbarians. It cannot be imagined, that they would have any feelings connected with the performance of a moral or religious duty in the massacre of enemies, between whom and themselves there existed the utmost hatred, that could be produced by a war of extermination ; a war which must have seemed to the Canaanites wholly unprovoked and unjustifiable. There is no good moral discipline in the butchery of women and infants. It is not thus that men are to be formed to the service of God. The origin of the supposed direction on which we have been remarking is to be found in the traditionary enmity of the Jews to the Canaanites, and in the ferocity of ancient warfare. The Jews, sharing in the barbarism of the world, reflected back their own character upon Moses and upon God.

III. I will not enter into the detail of the various precepts and laws, moral, ceremonial, and civil, which are blended together in the Pentateuch without arrangement and with much repetition. Concerning many of them it is incredible that they should have proceeded from the Deity. It is painful and disgusting to associate the distinguishing rite of the Jews with the idea of its having been solemnly appointed by God, and of its having been enforced in the manner related in the story respecting the circumcision of the sons of Moses.*—Nothing can render it probable that a law proceeded from God, according to which a man

* Exodus iv. 24-26.

who murdered his male or female slave by beating was to escape with impunity, if the slave did not die under his hands, but survived for a day or two,—with the reason given for it; “For the slave was his property.” *—Can any one, at the present day, persuade himself, that he is to refer to the Deity, laws such as the following? “A man or a woman who has a familiar spirit, or is a diviner, shall surely be put to death;”† “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live;”‡—laws, which have been the main support of one of the most debasing and cruel superstitions by which the Christian world has been disgraced.—We have seen that there is, properly speaking, no historical evidence for the genuineness of the Pentateuch. What, it may be asked, is the amount of

• Exodus xxi. 20, 21.—But with this law of the Jewish people may be compared that which Plato gives in relation to the same subject in his imaginary scheme of a perfect code of laws; “Should any man kill a slave, if it be his own, let him purify himself.” (De Legibus, Lib. ix. p. 868.) The master was to be subject to no punishment if he performed a religious expiation. Other laws follow respecting slaves, proposed by Plato, which are shocking to humanity.

The Levitical Law, like the whole Pentateuch, is to be viewed under two aspects. It is to be regarded, on the one hand, in reference to such a code as might, in our apprehension, be worthy of God; and, on the other hand, it is to be compared with such laws, and such conceptions of justice, as actually existed among heathen nations. When thus compared, there are in the laws respecting persons and property, what may seem clear traces of the effects of that divine dispensation which the Jews had enjoyed, appearing in a higher sense of justice and humanity. The laws respecting slaves, generally, notwithstanding that above quoted, provided for their security and welfare in a manner unknown among the Greeks or Romans. Among the Romans, till the time of the Emperors, a master had absolute power over his slave, unchecked, or rather unnoticed, by any law, so that he might put him to death by torture; and this power, as we may readily believe, was sometimes horribly abused. Nor does the condition of slaves in Greece appear, in general, to have been less unhappy. How they were regarded at Athens may be judged of by the laws proposed by Plato.

† Leviticus xx. 27.

‡ Exodus xxii. 18. See also Deuteronomy xviii. 9-12.—It has been contended by some in modern times, that these laws do not sanction the belief in witchcraft, but were directed only against impostors, falsely pretending to magical powers. But if such individuals had been meant, they would have been designated according to their true character as impostors, not in language which conveyed the idea, as plainly as any language could do, that their pretences were well founded. The belief in magic appears to have been universal in the ancient world. Such laws as we find in the Pentateuch had their origin in this belief, and could not be understood but as confirming it.

evidence, which would render the question worth discussing, Whether it be true or not, that "the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, Of birds ye shall have these in abomination ; they are not to be eaten, they are an abomination, the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the falcon, kites of every kind, ravens of every kind," &c. ; or that these and other similar injunctions should have been thus enforced ; " Ye shall not make yourselves abominable by eating any creeping reptile, nor make yourselves unclean and defiled thereby. For I Jehovah am your God. Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy, for I am holy." * To teach men, in the most solemn manner, that to refrain from particular kinds of food is essential to holiness, must tend only to pervert all their conceptions of holiness, duty, and God. The prohibition becomes more strange when we find articles of food enumerated to which nothing but the extremity of hunger could induce men to have recourse.—It is unnecessary to observe, that there are many of the Jewish laws on which delicacy forbids one to comment.†

The general aspect of the Jewish religion, as it appears in the books of the Pentateuch, may lead to the conclusion, that, at the time of the compilation of those books, the original doctrine of Moses had been greatly corrupted. The multiplication of trifling and burdensome ceremonies has been in every other case the result of low and very false notions of religion. The observance of such rites has been made a substitute for moral goodness, and in proportion as they have been considered as important in the view of God, has the regard of men been

* Leviticus xi.

† No considerations of this kind, however, restrained the learned Michaelis from discussing them at length. Of his " Commentaries on the Laws of Moses," originally delivered in Lectures to his pupils at Göttingen, it is not speaking too harshly to say, that its most striking characteristics are silliness and obscenity. Of the proper application of the latter term there can be no doubt ; as to the former, I know of none beside so well suited to express the frivolous gossip, and the wretched attempts at reasoning, with which the work abounds. The historian Müller says of Michaelis, whose lectures he attended when a young man, that he was "*homme d'esprit d'ailleurs et très-savant ; mais qui par sa manière burlesque de traduire et de commenter les poèmes des sages et des inspirés du peuple hébreu, en rendit pour quelque temps la lecture insoutenable à son disciple.*" (Lettres de Jean de Müller, précédées de sa Vie, p. xv.) Without doubt, such instructors were one cause of the deplorable state of religious speculation that has in our day existed in Germany.

withdrawn from all that constitutes real worth. The state in which our Saviour found the religion of the Jews, upon his appearance on earth, seems a natural consequence of the belief that the Levitical Law had been ordained by God ; while, on the other hand, the tendency to such a state may be supposed to have done much gradually to produce and strengthen this belief. We may, perhaps, compare those representations of Christianity which were given during the darkest period of the Romish superstition with that which the Pentateuch affords of the religion of Moses. The existence of the Gospels alone prevented the history of Christ from becoming equally fabulous with that of the Jewish prophet. Some of the apocryphal gospels, as those of the Infancy (as they are called), show the strong tendency to this result.

The views just given respecting the Levitical Law, are confirmed by much that is found in the Pentateuch itself, and in other books of the Old Testament ; but especially by the representations given in some of the Psalms, and in the earlier prophetic books. The authors of those writings insist in the strongest terms on moral goodness as the recommendation to God's favor, and dwell on the worthlessness of ritual observances. They use language which is apparently irreconcilable with the supposition, that they recognised the Levitical Law as appointed by God, or the history contained in the Pentateuch as authentic. To this subject we will next attend.

SECTION VI.

On the Views of Religion presented in the Writings of the Jewish Prophets, and in the Psalms, compared with those found in the Pentateuch.

It has been remarked, as affording evidence that the Pentateuch was not the work of Moses, that its authority is not appealed to by the Jewish prophets, the public teachers of religion among the Jews. But the writings of the higher class of prophets furnish evidence more direct to establish the same conclusion.

The religion inculcated in the Pentateuch consists very much in rites, and especially in offerings and sacrifices. The precepts concerning rites are multiplied, reiterated, and enforced in the most solemn

manner. But by the prophets *before the Captivity* such observances are spoken of in the most disparaging terms. The language in which our Saviour has been supposed to have *repealed* the Levitical Law is not more full and explicit. But those prophets had no authority to repeal that Law. Their language, therefore, proves that they did not recognise such observances as enforced by God, and, consequently, that they knew nothing of the Pentateuch as the work of Moses. Their spirit is wholly different from that which appears in the Levitical Law. They insist in the strongest terms upon moral goodness as the sole recommendation to God's favor.

But it may be said, that the prophets are to be understood as disparaging the observance of the ceremonial Law only when such observance was made a substitute for higher duties, or was practised by habitual transgressors; and were, therefore, far from teaching that a strict regard to its rites, as ordained by God, was not in the highest degree obligatory. This may appear at first view a plausible explanation of much of their language. But it is to be recollected, that if the Law proceeded from God, then the observance of the rites of the Law was a most solemn duty, taking its rank, so far as the Jews were concerned, with the clearest of those obligations, which are imperative upon all men. The explanation given, therefore, supposes that the prophets spoke contemptuously of one duty in order to excite men to perform other duties; that they treated with disrespect what God had commanded in order to lead men to obey his will. On the supposition, that the Levitical Law was ordained by God, the Jews offered sacrifices, and observed the other rites of that Law, because they believed them to have been commanded by God, and with the view of obtaining his favor. Thus far they acted right; and they were not to be reprovèd and discouraged in doing right, whatever, on the other hand, might be their deficiencies and sins. But, further than this, if there were no intrinsic moral worth in the ceremonies of the Law, then they could have been ordained only as means of holiness; and the absence of holiness in the people afforded no reason for repelling them from the appointed means of obtaining it. According to the representations of the Jewish history, they could hardly, at any time, have been a more perverse and disobedient race than their ancestors on whom those ceremonies were enjoined. It would, therefore, seem, that those who have acquiesced in the explanation that has been mentioned, can have done so only through uncon-

sciously transferring to the prophets their own secret and unacknowledged sense, unacknowledged even to themselves, of the worthlessness of the rites of the Levitical Law. The observance of them, it is agreed, did not constitute holiness; nor can it appear a suitable means of attaining it, if, as the explanation supposes, actual holiness was necessary to render such observance any thing but a matter of reprehension.

To illustrate the subject, let us imagine that the practices at one time in high repute in the Romish Church, fasting, the scourging of one's self, other self-inflicted sufferings, and the iteration of forms of prayer, all which were supposed to be conformable to the will of God, had been in fact expressly and most solemnly enjoined by him. It is evident, that no preacher of true religion, under a conviction that such was the fact, could, by way of reforming the Roman Catholic Church, even when fallen into its most corrupt state, have spoken of those practices contemptuously, or have made a disparaging comparison of them with other duties which he was recommending, or have ventured, through any license of rhetorical language, to represent them as not ordained and not required by God. The application of this imaginary case to the real case before us is too obvious to be dwelt upon.

With these general views let us consider some of the passages that occur in the writings of the prophets and in the Psalms.

The prophet Amos ascribes these words to Jehovah.*

“I hate, I despise your feasts ;
 I have no delight in your solemn assemblies ;
 When ye offer me burnt-offerings and flour-offerings, I will not
 accept them ;
 Nor will I look on the peace-offerings of your fatlings.
 Away with the noise of your songs :
 I will not listen to your harping :
 But let justice flow as water,
 And righteousness like a mighty river.
 Did ye offer me sacrifices and offerings
 In the wilderness, for forty years, O house of Israel ?”

Beside the general character of this passage, the concluding question

• Ch. v. 21-25.

may be particularly remarked. It is equivalent to a strong affirmation, that the Israelites did not offer sacrifices and offerings during the forty years after their leaving Egypt. But this is directly contrary to what is related in the Pentateuch.

Nothing can be more striking than the following passage from Micah.*

“ ‘ With what shall I appear before Jehovah,
And bow myself before the Most High God ?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
With calves of a year old ?
Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams ;
Or ten thousands of rivers of oil ?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression ;
The fruit of my body for my sin ?
‘ O man ! he has made known to thee what is good :
And what does Jehovah require of thee,
But to do justly, and to love mercy,
And to walk humbly before thy God ? ’ ”

I pass to the prophet Isaiah. †

“ Of what value are the multitude of your sacrifices to me ? says
Jehovah.
I am weary of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed
beasts ;
And I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of
goats.
Who hath required this of you, when ye come to appear before
me, to trample my courts ?
Bring no more vain oblations.”

“ Wash you ; make you clean ;
Put away your evil deeds from before my eyes ;
Cease to do evil ; learn to do well ;

* Ch. vi. 6-8.

† Ch. i. 11-17.

Seek to do justice ; relieve the oppressed ;
Do right to the fatherless ; defend the cause of the widow."

The following passage is from Jeremiah.* It may be remarked, that it was written after the discovery, as represented, of "the Book of the Law," in the reign of Josiah, and the events immediately consequent.

"Thus says Jehovah, God of hosts, God of Israel :
Put your burnt-offerings with your sacrifices, and eat the flesh ;
For I spake not to your fathers,
Nor commanded them, in the day when I brought them out of
Egypt,
Concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices.
But this did I command them, saying,
Obey my voice, and I will be your God,
And ye shall be my people."

"I spake not to your fathers, when I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices." With what astonishment must this declaration have been listened to by a contemporary Jew, believing the history in the Pentateuch, and consequently believing that the ceremonial Law was ordained by God. And with what feelings would he have regarded the prophet, if, upon questioning him as to his meaning, he had explained himself, as he has been most plausibly explained by modern commentators, in words like these ;—I did not mean to say, that God had "appointed no religious rites, such as sacrifices. For the most particular directions are given concerning them in the books of Moses." But I only intended, that God had "always laid less stress upon every thing of this kind than upon moral virtue." †

In the Pentateuch, Jehovah is repeatedly introduced as saying, "I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." ‡ With this declaration may be compared the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel.

• Ch. vii. 21-23.

† The words marked as quoted are taken from Dr. Priestley's note on the passage. I quote him only because he has expressed briefly and distinctly what has been said by many others.

‡ Exod. xx. 5 ; xxxiv. 7. Numbers xiv. 18. Deut. v. 9.

“ The word of Jehovah came to me again, saying ;

“ What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘ The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are on edge.’

“ As I live, saith the Lord, Jehovah, Ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.”

“ The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.

“ The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”

According to the Talmud, there was a discussion among the ancient Jewish doctors about allowing the book now ascribed to Ezekiel a place in the canon, and the majority were at one time disposed to reject it. Their objections to it were founded, it is said, upon passages contained in it, which were regarded as contradictory to the Pentateuch.*

It seems, from the book ascribed to him, that Ezekiel wrote during the Captivity. It is a work which is not to be generally referred to as presenting correct or agreeable representations of religion or of the Supreme Being. It is made repulsive by other characteristics beside its great obscurity. If the last nine chapters were written by him, it would appear that his mind was much occupied about ritual observances. But, putting aside what in these chapters it is difficult or impossible to understand, one striking fact presents itself. It is the want of correspondence between the directions for sacrifices there given and those found in the Pentateuch.†

With such passages as have been adduced from the prophets may be connected the remarkable quotation before given from one of the Psalms.‡ And there is a special reason for adding to them the declaration ascribed to God by Hosea.§

“ I desire goodness and not sacrifices,
And the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.”

* Bartolocci Biblioth. Hebr. P. ii. pp. 847, 848. Wolfii Biblioth. Hebr. Tom. ii. p. 156.

† Compare, for example, the forty-fifth and forty-sixth chapters of Ezekiel, with the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth chapters of Numbers.

‡ See before, p. 426.

§ Ch. vi. 6.

“Go ye and learn,” said our Saviour, “what this means, *I desire goodness and not sacrifices.*” * By thus adopting and sanctioning the declaration of the prophet, he bore testimony, that the true character and spirit of the religion of Moses were not to be found in the ritual Law, but that they were identical, as far as that declaration extends, with the spirit and character of his own. He places the prophet for a moment on a level with himself, as equally with himself rejecting the conception, that ceremonial observances were a means of obtaining God’s favor.

Such passages as we have been considering, may be thrown into stronger relief by comparing them with what appears in a later writer, who is to be referred to the same general class with those from whom we have quoted. Malachi was the last of the prophets, or, in other words, the last of those public religious teachers among the Jews to whom that name has been given. He lived, as is commonly thought, about a century after the return of the Jews to Palestine, that is, about four hundred years before Christ, when the authority of the ceremonial Law was established. His language in relation to it does not correspond with that of the prophets before the Captivity, but by its contrast it brings out in a more striking manner the character of those religious sentiments which they express, and serves to confirm the opinion, that the Levitical Law, in its present form, was not believed to be of divine authority among the Jews till after their return from their Captivity. Nothing answering to such passages as the following is to be found in any writer before that time.

“But ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?
 Ye bring polluted food to my altar.
 Yet ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee?
 In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is despicable.
 For when ye bring blind animals for sacrifice, ye say, It is not
 evil.
 And when ye bring lame and sick animals, ye say, It is not
 evil.” †

“Ye bring what has been plundered, and what is lame, and sick,
 And present it for an offering.

* Matthew ix. 13.

† Ch. i. 6-8.

Shall I accept it from your hands? says Jehovah.
Cursed be the deceiver who has a male in his flock,
And vows and sacrifices to Jehovah what is marred." *

" Shall a man rob God?
Yet ye rob me.
But ye say, In what have we robbed thee?
In tithes and offerings.
Ye are cursed with a curse;
For ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.
Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,
And let there be food in my house." †

With these representations of the Deity we may compare those of an earlier writer, the author of the fiftieth Psalm.

" I will reprove thee, not for the sake of thy sacrifices,
Nor of thy burnt-offerings, which are daily before me.
I will take no bullock from thy stalls,
Nor he-goat from thy folds;
For all the beasts of the forest are mine,
And the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the mountains;
And the wild beasts of the plains are before me.
If I were hungry, I would not tell thee:
For the world is mine, and all that is therein.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls?
Or drink the blood of goats?
Offer to God thanksgiving;
And fulfil thy vows to the Most High;
Then call upon me in the day of trouble;
And I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." ‡

* Ch. i. 13, 14.

† Ch. iii. 8-10.

‡ In the next Psalm (the fifty-first), a Psalm expressing deep penitence in the writer, is the following passage;

" Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it;
Thou dost not delight in burnt-offerings.
The sacrifice which God loves is a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

I notice this passage principally to observe, that there seems little doubt, that

In such passages appears, as I conceive, the true spirit of the religion which Moses was commissioned to teach ; and it is remarkable, that this spirit survived the belief that the Levitical Law was ordained by God through him. Religious sentiments, coincident with those which have been quoted from the earlier prophetic writings and the Psalms, are to be found in the higher class of Jewish writers of later times. Thus the author of Ecclesiasticus says ; *

“He who keeps the Law,” (a remarkable expression as defining what might be meant by “keeping the Law”)—“He who keeps the Law abounds in offerings ; he who gives heed to the commandments offers a peace-offering ; he who returns a favor makes an offering of fine flour ; he who gives alms offers a thank-offering ; he who departs from wickedness is accepted by the Lord ; and to forsake iniquity is a sin-offering.”

If inserted in any part of Leviticus, what a contrast would this passage form to the general tenor of that book ! It is remarkable, likewise, as showing what, in the view of the writer, was meant by “keeping the Law ;” that is to say, the performance of duties of universal obligation, exclusively of the observance of the ceremonial Law. As appears, however, from the passage itself, the ceremonial Law was fully established in his time ; and he accordingly subjoins, “Thou shalt not appear before the Lord with empty hands ; for all these things are to be done for the sake of the ordinances.”

The philosophical Jews of Alexandria appear to have laid little stress on the literal observance of the ritual Law, regarding all its precepts as symbolical. “God,” says Philo, “rejoices in devout affections, in men striving after holiness ; from whom he receives, well pleased, cakes, and barley, and the humblest offerings, as of greater worth than the most costly ; and should they bring nothing else, yet making an

the two verses which follow it are (as has been supposed) an addition by a later writer, after the Captivity. They not only have no connection with what precedes, but they stand in direct opposition to what has just been said by the original author. The verses referred to are these ;

“Do good to Zion according to thy mercy ;
Build up the walls of Jerusalem ;
Then shalt thou be pleased with right sacrifices,
With whole burnt-offerings :
Then shall bullocks be offered on thine altar.”

* Ch. xxxv. 1-3.

offering of themselves, perfect in goodness, they would make the best offering, while celebrating God, the Benefactor and Preserver, in hymns of thanksgiving,"—some uttered, as he goes on to say, and some un-uttered.*

A few words may be added from another passage of Philo : " True gratitude to God is not shown, as many think, in buildings, gifts, and sacrifices,—for not the whole world would be a worthy temple to his honor,—but in praises and hymns, not such as are sung with a loud voice, but such as sound forth in harmony from the invisible and most pure mind." " To confer benefits is the proper office of God ; to be grateful, that of the creature, who has nothing but gratitude to give in return. For would he render any other gift, he will find that it already belongs to the Maker of All, and not to the being who brings it. Being instructed, therefore, that there is but one thing for us to do in honoring God, to be grateful, about this let us, at all times and everywhere, be solicitous." †

The continuance and the strength of similar sentiments, among a portion of the Jews, are strikingly manifested by the existence of the sect of the Essenes, and the manner in which they were spoken of. They are described by Philo and Josephus as the most conscientious and religious of their countrymen. It may be observed, though it is not to our immediate purpose, that their religion and morality were of an ascetic and monastic character. Their virtues were those which, in other times, have been produced among Christians as the growth of strong principles in a very corrupt state of society ; in such a state of society, as may incline those who would attain the religious character to separate themselves from the world, and, in renouncing its pleasures, to neglect many of its duties. But the Essenes, as I have said, were the most virtuous among their countrymen in the view even of Philo ; and this sect, so regarded by him and by Josephus, offered no sacrifices. " They send gifts to the temple," says Josephus, " but offer no sacrifices ; their modes of purification being different ; and hence, being excluded from the common sanctuary, they offer themselves as a sacrifice." ‡ And he goes on to say, that " they deserve admiration above

* De Victimis Offerentibus. Opp. ii. 253.

† De Plantatione Noë. Opp. i. 348.

‡ ἐφ' αὐτῶν τὰς θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσι.

all those who have cultivated virtue." * "Among them," says Philo, "are especially to be found worshippers of God, men who sacrifice no animals, but deem it their duty to sanctify their own minds." † How was it that Philo and Josephus thus celebrated the religious character of men, who, if the Levitical Law proceeded from God, neglected his express commands? Neither has expressed, nor is it probable that either felt, any doubt, that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, and that the ritual Law proceeded from God. Philo's system of allegorizing might have enabled him to explain away the whole obvious meaning of its commands concerning sacrifices; but he has not done so in his writings. The answer, therefore, it would seem, is partly, at least, to be found in the general fact, that prevalent errors are often acquiesced in, and even, when directly called in question, zealously defended, by individuals who do not attend to their necessary bearing, on whose prevailing habits of thought and feeling they have very little influence, and who hold truths wholly irreconcilable with them.

There are, then, two very different aspects under which the religion of Moses appears. One is that which is presented in the ritual Law; the other is that which is found in portions of the Pentateuch, in the higher class of writers of the Old Testament, who, as we have seen reason to think, lived before the belief prevailed, that the ritual Law came from God, and even in the higher class of Jewish writers of after times. The spirit of the Jewish religion, as represented by them, is coincident with the spirit of the religion of Christ.

The general conclusion seems to be, that the revelation of God through Moses was made at so remote a period, that no contemporary or early history of it remains; though imperishable monuments of it exist in the effects which it produced; and that there was nothing in this communication of God to a peculiar people,—I do not say contrary to the spirit of the religion of Christ, for this it would be absurd to suppose,—but that there was nothing in it, which the great messenger of God to the whole world was called upon or commissioned to abrogate. He came not "to annul the law and the Prophets,"—that is, the true religion of Moses,—but "to perfect." There was an opposition between his religion and the contemporary religion of the Jews, that

* Antiq. Jud. Lib. xviii. c. 1. § 5.

† Quod liber sit quisquis virtuti studet. Opp. ii. 457.

very corrupt religion which had gradually been formed in their nation ; but certainly no opposition between his religion and that of Moses, if, as we believe, Moses was, like him, a messenger from God.

SECTION VII.

On the Inferences respecting the Levitical Law and the Pentateuch, to be drawn from the Teaching and Actions of our Saviour.

The ritual Law was done away by Christianity ; or, in other words, it was not binding upon Jewish Christians. Of the distinguishing rite of the Jews, St. Paul says to the Galatians, " In Jesus Christ," that is, in Christianity, " neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith, showing itself by love ;"* and he reiterates the declaration at the very close of the Epistle.—Philo speaks of the law respecting the Jewish Sabbath, as " that most holy and awful law." He relates, that a governor of Egypt, in his time, had endeavoured to compel the Jews to violate it, thinking that, if this could be effected, it would lead them to abandon all their peculiar customs, and neglect all the ordinances of their religion.† St. Paul says, " One man regards one day more than another, another man regards every day alike. Let each be fully satisfied in his own mind. He who regards the day regards it as a servant of the Lord ; and he who regards not the day regards it not as a servant of the Lord."‡ He is speaking of the observance of the Jewish Sabbath, as an ordinance of the Levitical Law.—We have seen how solemnly the distinction was enforced in this Law between clean and unclean food. " I know," says St. Paul, and am satisfied, as a disciple of Christ, " that there is nothing unclean in itself ; but to him who thinks any thing unclean it is unclean."§ This is but a very small part of the evidence which his Epistles afford, that he did not consider the Levitical Law as binding upon Christians.

What view he himself entertained of its origin, and of the authorship of the Pentateuch, would be an interesting and curious inquiry, but it is foreign from our present purpose. The Apostles, generally, appear to have long held the prevailing opinions of their countrymen

* Galatians v. 6.

† De Somniis. Opp. i. 675.

‡ Romans xiv. 5, 6.

§ Romans xiv. 14.

respecting the Law, and probably their minds were always more or less affected by them. It was not till many years after the death of our Saviour, that they were satisfied by an express revelation, that the ritual Law was not to be imposed on the Gentile converts. By the great body of Jewish converts it continued to be observed, and its authority to be zealously maintained. St. Paul, it is evident from the New Testament, incurred much odium among the Jewish believers from his assertion of the truth.

But, if the ritual Law were not binding upon Christians, the question arises upon what ground it was abrogated. Was it, as has been represented, solemnly ordained by God through Moses, and as solemnly annulled by God through Christ? Or was it a law of human growth, a system of superstitious observances, opposed in character and spirit to Christianity, and, therefore, a system, the error of which was involved in the truth of our religion?

Had the ritual Law been, as represented in the Pentateuch, promulgated by God, it is evident that the obligation of the Jews to obey that law could not cease till it was explicitly and solemnly repealed by God. But we find nowhere any declaration of our Saviour recognising its divine origin, and asserting his commission from God to declare it no longer binding. One of two inferences necessarily follows; either that the law remained binding upon his followers from among the Jews, contrary to what is affirmed by St. Paul, and contrary, as we shall see, to what he himself taught by his actions and words, or that this law did not proceed from God, and, therefore, that no express declaration was necessary to invalidate its authority.

But it may be asked, on the other hand, Why did not our Saviour explicitly declare the fact, if the ritual Law was a system of human superstition? The question, in other words, is this, Why did he not outrage to the uttermost the prejudices of those whom he called upon to be his followers? Many errors connected with religion, of more or less importance, were entertained by his hearers, which he did not undertake to correct. All truth could not be communicated to men so unprepared for, or rather so opposed to, the reception of the few great truths which it was his office to communicate. The revelation from God was not given to do the whole work of human reason on all subjects connected with religion. To imagine the possibility of such a revelation, man's nature and condition continuing as they are, is to imagine an ab-

surdity; for it is to suppose a constant miraculous illumination of all individual minds, extending over so wide a sphere of facts and opinions, as to embrace all the more important objects of thought. The attention of his hearers was to be fixed on those fundamental principles of religion that immediately concern the essential and eternal interests of man, and which it was the purpose of his ministry to announce on the authority of God. From those principles their minds were not to be distracted to the consideration of minor topics, which, however important, were incomparably less important. Had he undertaken to correct all the wrong opinions of the Jews, more or less connected with religion, a cloud of misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and controversies, would have arisen, obscuring the whole of his teaching. That in order to accomplish the great purpose of his mission, it was necessary for Jesus to refrain from directly opposing many gross errors of his countrymen, is a fact to be constantly kept in view in considering his history. I have elsewhere endeavoured to illustrate it more fully.*

But it may be further said, that our Saviour not only did not oppose, but that he asserted and sanctioned the belief of the Jews concerning the Pentateuch and the Levitical Law. There are passages, fewer perhaps than is commonly thought, which would support this proposition, supposing that Jesus had been addressing a body of enlightened and unprejudiced men, and that, moreover, we could be assured that his words were reported with verbal accuracy.

The general spirit and meaning of our Saviour's teaching, as recorded in the Gospels, is free from all uncertainty. If we receive it as the teaching of a divine messenger, it leaves no doubt concerning the fundamental truths of religion,—the being of God, God's care for men, and man's immortality and moral responsibility. But in the words ascribed to him, we sometimes meet with difficulties, not affecting the clearness with which those truths were taught, but preventing us from readily or certainly ascertaining the precise purport and bearing of what he said in relation to topics incidentally presented.

Among the various causes by which this uncertainty is produced, there is one perfectly obvious and indisputable, though it has been less regarded, perhaps, than any other. It is, that his words are not always

* "Statement of Reasons for not believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians," Appendix, p. 313, seqq.

given with verbal accuracy by the different historians of his ministry. We need not recur to any reasoning to show that this fact is in the highest degree probable. The cases in which the Evangelists unquestionably intended to report the same words of Jesus, but in which they differ from each other in their reports, render it certain. It follows, that there must be passages, where, to determine the exact meaning that was expressed by our Saviour, we cannot take the precise words of some one of the Evangelists as an infallible guide. When we meet with a difficulty that cannot otherwise be fully solved, the consideration, that the reporter may have varied the expression used by Jesus, should enter into our explanation.

Now such unintentional errors, more or less affecting the sense, were most likely to occur on subjects concerning which strong prejudices existed among the Jews, that had moulded their forms of language, if they were prejudices that Jesus did not directly oppose. Every one easily slides into the language of a popular error, or rather we may find it difficult to avoid such language, when not expressly contending against the error. But on the supposition, that the Evangelists had not decidedly renounced the opinions of their countrymen respecting the Pentateuch and the Levitical Law, we cannot doubt that they might unconsciously attribute to Jesus incidental expressions favoring those opinions ;—that they might have done so in cases, where, if his precise words had been compared with their report of them, they would not have recognised any important difference of character or effect between his language and their own.

The unquestionable fact, that the words of our Saviour are not always reported with perfect correctness, is to be kept in view in studying the history of his ministry. It will not lead us to reject any declaration ascribed to him, as not founded on what he actually said, or as not, in its *essential* meaning, true ; but it may enter as one element into our explanation of certain passages. It is sometimes evident that it must enter into our explanation ; for it sometimes appears, from a comparison of the Evangelists with one another, that the report of our Saviour's language, which we find in one of them, is defective, or otherwise incorrect, and therefore, that this report must be explained with reference to the fact, that it is so.

The general principle of explanation just stated deserves consideration, doubtless, in relation to some of the words ascribed to Jesus, that

have been thought to express or imply his opinions concerning the origin of the Pentateuch and the Levitical Law. It may, as I have said, enter as one element into their explanation. But we may question how far it is necessary to resort to it, considering that another fact is to be attended to. This is, that our Saviour, on some subjects, and on some occasions, adopted the common language of the Jews, founded on their erroneous conceptions, certainly without any design of sanctioning those conceptions. He sometimes did so for the purpose of changing the meaning of the terms by giving them a new application. Thus the Jews, under the name of "the kingdom of Heaven," expected an earthly kingdom, of which the Messiah was to be the monarch. The idea of such a kingdom alone was excited in their minds, when Jesus announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. But he used the term figuratively, in a very different sense, which was to be gradually explained by subsequent events.—Sometimes he used such language for the purpose of rhetorical illustration, which may be drawn either from fact or fable. "When an unclean spirit," he said, "has gone out of a man, it passes through desert places in search of rest."* No intelligent reader will suppose from these words, that our Saviour meant to adopt and sanction the then common notion, that desert places were frequented by demons.—At other times he is reasoning upon the false conceptions of those whom he addressed, reasoning *ad hominem*, as it is called. "If I cast out demons through Beëlzebub," he said, "through whom do your disciples cast them out?"† There were some of the school of the Pharisees, it appears, who pretended to cast out demons by exorcism, and who, when they succeeded in producing a real or seeming return to sanity in their patients, were thought to have effected a great work. Our Saviour did not mean to imply that these men possessed powers like his own. The object of his question merely was to expose the prejudices and gross injustice of the Pharisees, who believed that their disciples had, in the one particular in question, similar power to that of Christ, and who, in his case and theirs, regarded its exercise so differently. In such reasoning from false conceptions, the language of error is necessarily used. The character of such reasoning may be more or less obvious; and when not perfectly obvious, he who does not exercise his understanding, but looks only at the naked words before him, may insist that a speaker or writer means

* Matthew xii. 43.

† Matthew xii. 27.

to affirm an error, which, in fact, he introduces into his discourse only to show its inconsistency with some other error, or as a temporary stepping-stone on the way to truth.—And, beside the occasions that have been mentioned, language founded on the mistaken conceptions of the Jews was employed by our Saviour, either for the sake of producing an effect on the imagination and feelings of his hearers, which could not have been produced, or could not have been produced so powerfully, in any other way, or of conveying some truth to their understandings, which they could not have distinctly apprehended, if expressed in any other form. Thus he spoke, for example, of moral evil, under the terrific personification of Satan. In such cases we must, and we may easily, distinguish his essential meaning from the modes of expression in which it is clothed,—modes of expression adapted to Jewish conceptions, but not correspondent to our own. Some of the truths taught by Jesus could not but receive an accidental coloring from the medium of the language through which they were conveyed; and we must not confound this accidental coloring with their essential nature.* But this subject admits some further explanation.

Every language is conformed to the conceptions of those who use it, and consists wholly of the signs or expressions of their conceptions. The progress of knowledge makes necessary the enlargement of a language. The discoveries of modern chemistry, for example, have required a new vocabulary, in which they may be preserved and communicated. When, on any subject of wide extent, the conceptions of the generality of men are erroneous, their errors enter into the structure of their speech; they are embodied in the words which they use. It is often necessary for him who would correct such errors to introduce new terms, or to give new senses, or a new application, to terms already in use. When circumstances do not require, or admit, that

* The principle involved in the preceding remarks, that in explaining the words of our Lord we should consider to whom they were immediately addressed, is equally implied in the following passage from Tertullian,—a very remarkable one, considering the time when it was written,—though he makes a different application of it: “*Omnia quidem dicta Domini omnibus posita sunt; per aures Judæorum ad nos transierunt; sed pleraque in personas directa, non proprietatem admonitionis nobis constituerunt, sed exemplum.*”—“All the sayings of our Lord are meant for all; they have passed to us through the ears of the Jews; but many of them, being addressed to individuals, are not, for us, literal precepts, but exemplifications of duty.” *De Præscript. Hæretic.* c. 8. p. 205. *Conf. De Fugâ in Persecutione*, c. 13. pp. 542, 543.

those errors should be controverted, the language in which they are incorporated may be used by one fully acquainted with the truth. It may often be employed with propriety and advantage. There are occasions when, by its use, right conceptions and feelings may be produced, which could not be communicated by language more correct. I understand (for it is a subject on which I am incapable of forming an independent opinion) that, at the present day, many of those qualified to judge reject the theory of the emission of rays from luminous bodies, and regard the sensation of light as produced by the undulations of a luminous æther, as that of sound is caused by undulations of the air. Supposing this theory to be true, and that it should be universally received, the language which has been formed upon the old belief will not soon, if ever, cease to be the language of common life and of poetry. Though, upon the supposition just made, this language implies throughout what is contrary to the truth; yet it is equally well adapted to the expression of all truths that concern the generality of men, as language conformed to the correct theory. It will, at least for a long time, be better adapted to this purpose, as being more intelligible to the unlearned; more conformed to the appearances, if not to the reality, of things. Nor can we, with our present associations, readily believe, that a similar profusion of figures and imagery to that which poetry now borrows from light may be effectively addressed to men's imagination and feelings through the medium of other forms of language than those to which we are accustomed. So also in Chemistry; however requisite the new nomenclature may be for the purposes of science, it is unimportant, except indirectly, as regards the arts or medicine. The old terms might, in many cases, serve equally well for the practical purposes of life. We might continue to call one substance "the Oil of Vitriol," and another "the Sugar of Lead," and, notwithstanding the erroneous ideas suggested by those names, we might talk of them as intelligently, and explain their properties and uses as correctly, as if we denominated them "Sulphuric Acid," and "the Acetate of Lead;" and, in speaking to those familiar only with the former names, no one would hesitate to use them. Truth, then, may be clearly and effectually conveyed in the language of error; that is to say, in terms having their origin in erroneous conceptions, and adapted to the expression of those conceptions.

In the time of our Saviour, the notions of the Jews on many subjects connected with his preaching were false and superstitious. These notions were necessarily ingrained in their forms of speech. A philosophical language, in which they should be avoided, might undoubtedly have been formed by him ; and such a language might have been intelligible to the philosophers, if there were any philosophers, among the Jews. But our Saviour preached to the poor, he addressed multitudes, his immediate disciples were fishermen and taxgatherers, and others of no higher intellectual attainments, and he could use only popular language, such language as his hearers would understand and feel. He might, on a certain occasion, have said, I foresee the triumph of my religion over evil, moral and physical ; but, even had he been partially understood by his hearers, if they had had some notion of what was meant by "evil, moral, and physical," and by "the triumph of his religion," the assertion would have passed over their minds as a shadowy abstraction, and left no impression. He did in fact say, with the same meaning, "I saw Satan falling like lightning from Heaven ;" and, in so saying, he used imagery which was adapted to their conceptions and feelings. The whole phraseology of the Jews concerning the Pentateuch and the other books of the Old Testament was moulded on their erroneous opinions respecting those books. Our Saviour might have avoided the use of it, and introduced new modes of speech, conformed to the truth. In this case, it is probable that he would have abundantly excited their attention. Such a fundamental change in their religious language would have exposed him to questioning. Pharisees would have come "to try him" on the subject. What would have been the effect, if he had declined to explain himself ? What would have been the consequences, if he had explained himself ? In the latter case, unless God had seen fit to use other means, than he did, for establishing truth among men, the whole ministry of Jesus might have been wasted, and he might have died a martyr to an ineffectual attempt to correct the false opinions of his countrymen in relation to the Old Testament and the Levitical Law. What he did do, that is, what the circumstances of his ministry permitted him to do, to manifest his sense of those errors, will appear hereafter.

Essential truths, then, may be clearly and effectually, sometimes most effectually, conveyed in the language of error. It is true, that one writing at the present day on any subject of morals or religion,

who may suppose himself to be addressing intelligent and well-informed readers, is bound, as far as possible, to avoid such language, when it may occasion any mistake as to his meaning. It is his duty to express himself with unequivocal distinctness. But such language, in regard to many topics, constituted the popular or rather the only language of the Jews; and our Saviour was placed in circumstances altogether different from those of a philosopher of our own times. That he might not distract the attention of his hearers from the great truths which it was the purpose of his mission to make known, that he might not uselessly alarm their prejudices and rouse their passions, he sometimes adopted their common language, though founded on error. We are not hence to consider him as sanctioning their errors. Such language, as used by him, is to be understood as we always understand the language of error when used by one whom we believe fully to comprehend the truth, and to have no purpose but to express it. We view it as an adaptation of his thoughts to the conceptions of those whom he addresses; or as the presentation of ideas, essentially correct, in the only forms in which they have been embodied in language, though these forms may contain an alloy of error. In the teaching of our Saviour it is the essential meaning alone that is to be regarded. The form of expression may be an accident, resulting from temporary and local circumstances, from the character of those whom he immediately addressed, and, especially, from the nature of their conceptions and language.

The facts that have been stated, in connection with those now generally recognised in the interpretation of the New Testament, may serve to explain the passages in which our Saviour has been thought to sanction the common opinions of the Jews respecting the origin of the Levitical Law and the authorship of the Pentateuch. I will notice, for the sake of illustration, one of those passages, perhaps the most remarkable. In the Gospel of John, our Saviour is represented as thus addressing his Jewish hearers; “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; *for he wrote concerning me*;” that is, “what he wrote concerns me.” *

Here, it may be said, is an express assertion of our Saviour, that “Moses wrote;” and, if we will not raise an idle cavil, grounded on the supposition, that Moses may have written a part, but not the whole,

* John v. 46.

of the Pentateuch, we must admit him to have been its author ; and consequently admit that the Levitical Law proceeded from God.

But, on the other hand, it may be remarked, that to affirm that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch is, obviously, not the main purpose of the passage. Its *essential* meaning is, Had ye received with true faith the religion taught by Moses, and had it produced its proper effect on your minds, ye would have received me ; for the dispensation by Moses concerned me ; it was intended as a preparation for me.

It is, then, to be considered, that, in regard to the *incidental* meaning supposed to be expressed by the passage as it now stands, it rests wholly on a single word. If, instead of the words, "Moses *wrote* concerning me," our Saviour in fact said, "Moses *taught* concerning me," (that is, What Moses taught concerns me,) then the declaration, without any change in its *essential* meaning, would suggest no such inferences as have been drawn from it. In order, therefore, to draw those inferences from it, we should be certain that St. John reported his Master's language with verbal exactness. But it is not likely that he committed it to writing till many years after it was uttered ; and it is altogether probable, that if, when he committed it to writing, the question had been proposed to him, whether our Saviour said "Moses wrote," or "Moses taught," or "Moses spoke," he would have been unable to solve the doubt. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose, that of these expressions, all equally suitable to the *main purpose* of Jesus, he might not have remarked that there was reason for preferring one to another. It is to be recollected, that the fact is unquestionable, that the Evangelists did not always report the language of their Master with verbal exactness.

But, supposing that the words before us are the very words of our Saviour, how are we then to regard them ? We may regard them as an address *ad hominem*, as an incidental and temporary adoption of the conceptions and language of those to whom he was speaking, in relation to a subject foreign from his immediate purpose. We may understand him as if he had said ; Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for the books which, *as you suppose*, Moses wrote, concern me. If it be asked, how those books concerned our Saviour, the answer is, that all the truths preserved in those books derived from, or relating to, the revelation by Moses, concerned him for whom this dispensation was preparatory. Those books clearly taught, that there was

one God, the Creator of all things, ruling over all things, and exercising a moral government over men,—loving righteousness and hating iniquity. The foundation of all true religion was thus laid. He whose character had been formed on the belief of those truths was prepared to receive the truths taught by Jesus. The books preserving the traditions concerning Moses likewise presented in the strongest light the fact, that the Jews had been miraculously separated by God from other nations. The Jews believed, and reasonably believed, that this separation had been made for some great end, yet unaccomplished. They were expecting a new messenger from God to complete the work. This end was to be accomplished by Christ. He was the expected Messenger,—the Messiah. These, I conceive, are the reasons why the books ascribed to Moses concerned him. Whatever mixture of error they might contain, they still preserved the traditions of that earlier dispensation, the main purpose of which was to prepare for his coming.

In the wide field which is to be traversed in this investigation, we are led to take different views of the Pentateuch, but they are all perfectly reconcilable with each other. We must not estimate its value to a pious Jew before the coming of Christ, by the opinion which an enlightened Christian may now form of its authorship and its errors. To have broadly communicated such an opinion to the former, by way of enlightening his mind on the subject of religion, would have implied any thing but wisdom in his religious teacher. A pious Jew perhaps resolved its difficulties into allegories, or more commonly, it may be, passed over them without suffering his attention to dwell upon them, as intelligent Christians have done. There are, perhaps, but few men, into whose system of opinions errors do not enter, irreconcilable with truths which they firmly hold, and such as might have a disastrous effect upon their character. But these errors often lie inert in the mind, unregarded, and inoperative on the feelings and conduct. He whose intentions are right has, at least under favorable circumstances, a moral corrective in his heart for his mistakes of speculation; or, in the inconsistency of his opinions, the true may neutralize the effects of the erroneous.

There are still other considerations to be attended to respecting the relation of Christianity to the Levitical Law. This law consists of two parts. It was both the ritual and the civil law of the Jews. On the one hand, it regulated the ceremonies of their national religion, and,

on the other, it was their statute law concerning civil rights, crimes, and punishments. Now in the simple performance of the ceremonies ordained by it there was no moral harm. What it prescribed might be innocently complied with. Accordingly, we find that Jesus sometimes observed its ordinances, as in the celebration of the Passover; and that they were regarded not only by the other Apostles, but occasionally also by St. Paul, when *to the Jews he became as a Jew*. But so far, as the Levitical was the civil law of the nation, obedience to it was not merely innocent, it was a duty, binding upon the followers of Christ, equally with the rest of their countrymen. Thus our Saviour says; "The Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses," that is, they expound and administer the laws of the nation, they exercise an authority similar to that once held by Moses; "Whatever, therefore, they bid you observe, that observe and do:"* submit to their authority, as ministers of the law, whatever may be their private vices. Thus, too, when reproving the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees for their affected scrupulosity in paying tithes of mint, anise and cummin, he said to them; "These ought ye to do, and not to leave the other undone."† It was a right principle, that the law was to be observed even in its minor requirements.

There was, as I have said, no moral harm simply in the observance of the rites of the Jewish religion by one who considered them as matters of indifference. But, on the supposition that these rites were not ordained by God, there can be no question that the tendency of such a system of ceremonies, regarded as an essential part of religion, was to strengthen, more and more, gross misconceptions of religion and of the religious character; and to produce that outward show of sanctity, accompanied with real depravity, which marked the general character of the Pharisees in the time of Christ. When the observance of ceremonies is raised to the same rank with the performance of duties, in the confusion that ensues, the former usually supersedes the latter. Men find it much easier to satisfy themselves concerning their religious character by doing certain definite acts, that require no struggle with their evil passions, than by aiming at indefinite improvement, which demands constant humility, watchfulness, and self-control.

The ritual Law, as has been before remarked, was not solemnly repealed by our Saviour in the name of God, as if it had been solemnly

* Matthew xxiii. 2, 3.

† Matthew xxiii. 23.

promulgated by God ; it fell before his teaching like a form of human superstition. The contrariety thus manifested between the character and spirit of his religion and the character and spirit of the ritual Law ; the manner, in other words, in which this law was done away by Christianity, shows that the common opinion of the Jews respecting its divine origin was not sanctioned by the teaching of our Saviour. But in relation to this subject there is more to be considered.

If Jesus had publicly and explicitly declared the error of the long-cherished belief of the Jews, such a storm of prejudice and passion would have been excited in the great body of the nation, and such confusion and bewilderment of mind would have been produced among those best disposed to listen to him, as would, to all human apprehension, have defeated the purpose of his ministry. It was a truth to be taught indirectly. But he did not leave it to be inferred only from the character of his religion. He gave other intimations of it, sufficiently intelligible. He went to the very limits, within which a divine wisdom restrained him, in bearing his testimony against the error of the Jews ; and this testimony, though its whole effect was not understood, was yet so offensive, that it could not be given but at the hazard of his life.

I refer to that language and those actions of our Saviour, which distinctly imply that the Levitical Law was not of divine origin. In the investigation of this evidence an unexplored subject opens upon us.

It will be recollected in what terms Philo, certainly no bigot for the literal observance of the Levitical Law, speaks of the Jewish Sabbath.* “Whoever does any work on the Sabbath shall surely be put to death,” is a law repeatedly given in Exodus.† “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath.”‡ In Numbers§ we read, that a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath ; “and the Lord said to Moses ; This man shall surely be put to death ; the whole congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.” So strict, according to the Levitical Law, was to be the observance of the Sabbath, and so fearful a crime was any breach of the statute represented to be.

But Jesus repeatedly disregarded, or countenanced the disregard, of the law respecting the Sabbath ; and he did so at the hazard of his

* See before, p. 475.

† Exodus xxxv. 3.

‡ Ch. xxxi. 14. Ch. xxxv. 2.

§ Ch. xv. 32-36.

life. But it is not to be imagined, that he thus manifested his disregard for that law wantonly; or that such hazard was encountered without the purpose of effecting some important end. What, then, could this end be, except to teach indirectly the superstitious character of such observances as the Levitical Law required, and especially of such representations concerning the extreme guilt of neglecting them as that Law presented? Let us attend to some of the examples.

When, as he was passing through a field of grain on the Sabbath,* his disciples gathered the ears of grain and ate them, and the Pharisees said; "Lo, thy disciples are doing what the Law forbids on the Sabbath," his reply, it is to be observed, did not contradict their assertion. But, for the obvious reasons before given, he could not *directly* tell them that this Law was not from God, and was not binding upon men. What, then, did he say? He first made one of those annunciations of his high character and of the sanctity of his office, which were so necessary to the accomplishment of his ministry. David, their great monarch, the supposed type of the Messiah, had broken the Law, when himself and his companions were hungry; and what David had done without censure, he might do without censure. The priests performed their work in the temple on the Sabbath notwithstanding the Law; and those who addressed him were in the presence of "one greater than the temple." In such declarations there is no recognition of the divine authority of the Law, and still less in what follows. "But, had ye known what this means, *I desire goodness and not sacrifices*, ye would not have condemned the guiltless." These words imply, that such an observance of the Sabbath as the Law enforced in a manner so terrific had not been required by God, and was not acceptable to him. "For the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The general truth involved in this declaration is, that what God requires man to do is for the benefit of man; he demands no slavish observance of mere ceremonies. "So that the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath:"—So that I, the messenger of God, have a right to dispense with such ceremonies.

Jesus repeatedly performed his miracles on the Sabbath, twice, as is related, in a synagogue.† To meet the offence of the Jews, at his thus breaking the rest of the day, he presented the same essential idea in

* Matthew xii. 1-8. Mark ii. 23-28. Luke vi. 1-5.

† Matthew xii. 9-14. Mark iii. 1-6. Luke vi. 6-11. Luke xiii. 10-17.

different forms of expression. "Who among you, that owns a sheep; if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more worth is a man than a sheep! It is lawful, then, to do good on the Sabbath." If our Saviour had attached any sanctity to the law respecting the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath; if it had not been his express purpose indirectly to show that he did not regard it as of divine origin, he might, and undoubtedly would, have deferred the performance of his miracle till another day. In justification of his conduct, he taught that all good works, even those for the relief of inferior animals, as the taking of a sheep from a pit, or the leading of an ox or an ass to water, might be performed on the Sabbath. The license which the Pharisees allowed themselves, in regard to the actions specified, precluded any ready reply to this doctrine. But how much they were outraged by what he did and what he taught, appears from the narrative: "Then the Pharisees went out, and concerted means to destroy him."

Early in his ministry, at Jerusalem, by the pool of Bethesda, he restored to health one who had been a cripple for thirty-eight years, and directed him to rise, take up his bed and walk. This was done on the Sabbath. The Jews, in consequence, pursued Jesus with the purpose of killing him, "because he had done this on the Sabbath." * They were acting in conformity, as doubtless they thought, to the law in Exodus; "Whoever does any work on the Sabbath shall surely be put to death." "After this Jesus would not, for some time, sojourn in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him." Afterward he went up to Jerusalem, at the Feast of Tabernacles, and referred, in his first public discourse after his arrival, to the danger to which he had exposed himself, by breaking through the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath. "Why do you seek to kill me?" he asked. Why, when ye allow a child to be circumcised on the Sabbath, "are ye angry with me, because I have restored soundness to the whole body of a man on the Sabbath?" †

We cannot doubt, that Jesus meant to convey some very important instruction in actions which form so prominent a part of his ministry. It could not have been for any light purpose, that he thus repeatedly put his life in jeopardy. Supposing the representations relating to the Sabbath contained in the Pentateuch to be correct, our Saviour would

* John v. 1-16.

† John vii. 19-23.

not have pursued the course which he did merely for the sake of correcting the over-scrupulous notions of some of the more bigoted Jews concerning its observance. The end would have been too trifling, and too little connected with any high moral and religious object, to be aimed at by means so hazardous. Nor, supposing those representations of it correct, would it have been easy for the wisest and most liberal-minded of the Jews to draw a line between the scrupulous observance of the day, which was so solemnly required, and the over-scrupulous observance of it, which, after all, was simply not required. Taking another view of the subject, if the ritual Law were ordained by God, we cannot believe that our Lord meant, by these actions, indirectly and tacitly to repeal it. A law so solemnly promulgated by God could not be indirectly and tacitly repealed. There is but one other purpose which can be ascribed to his actions. It is, that they were intended, at any risk which the purposes of his mission allowed, to indicate that that Law was not ordained by God, but was a system of human superstition.

We must not refine in drawing inferences from the words of Jesus, as if they were those of a philosophical treatise, written with great precision, and were not popular language, addressed to rude, unenlightened hearers, with strong prejudices, and incapable of any accurate exercise of intellect. We must regard their essential meaning, and consider the effect obviously intended. But the words used by him at the Feast of Tabernacles, in reference to the facts just mentioned, have a bearing not obvious, perhaps, at first sight, but which, without any violation of the principles just laid down, we cannot well doubt was purposed by our Lord. They have been partly quoted already.

“Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet no one of you regards the Law? Why do you seek to kill me? The crowd answered him; Thou art mad: who seeks to kill thee? Jesus replied to them; I have done one work, at which ye all are astounded. Moses gave you circumcision,—not that it comes from Moses, but from the fathers,—and ye circumcise a child on the Sabbath. If a child be circumcised on the Sabbath, that the Law of Moses may not be broken,* are ye angry with me for restoring soundness to the whole body of a man on the

* As a child, according to the Law, was to be circumcised on the eighth day after its birth, the rite was performed on the Sabbath, if that happened to be the eighth day.

Sabbath? Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteously.”*

Considering the manner in which circumcision is represented in the Pentateuch as having been ordained and enforced, there is something well deserving attention in the words in which our Lord first refers it to Moses, and then to the fathers, as if it were, at most, a mere ordinance of Moses, or a traditionary rite of the Jews, sanctioned by him. He does not speak of it as appointed by God. “If a child,” he proceeds, “be circumcised on the Sabbath, that the Law of *Moses* may not be broken, are ye angry with *me*,” for what I have done? The word “*me*” is here emphatic. The sentence is antithetical. The question belongs to the class of those passages, in which our Saviour demanded for himself deference like that, or greater than that, which the Jews had been accustomed to pay to those whom they most honored under their old dispensation; as when he said, “A greater than Solomon is here;”—“Before Abraham existed I was He;”—“Have ye not read what David did?” But, if we follow the Pentateuch in referring the rite mentioned, not to Moses, but to God, as its proper author, the language becomes altogether unsuitable. We shall, at once, perceive this by substituting for “the Law of Moses” an expression corresponding to that conception: “if a child be circumcised on the Sabbath, that the *Law of God* may not be broken, are ye angry with *me*?”—“Are ye angry with me,” our Saviour goes on, “for restoring soundness to the whole body of a man?” In these words, the antithesis between the act which he had performed, and the act performed in circumcision, represents the latter, not as a sacred and most important rite, but as a mere mutilation of the body.

The ordinances concerning clean and unclean food form a prominent feature of the ceremonial Law.† The animals enumerated as unclean were to be an abomination to the Israelites. The touch of their dead bodies was pollution. It rendered even inanimate things unclean. The washing of men, and garments, and vessels, or the breaking of the latter, is enjoined in consequence of it. Minute and extraordinary directions are given concerning it.‡ The Jews were not to “make

* John vii. 19-24.

† Leviticus, Ch. ix. Deuteronomy, Ch. xiv.

‡ As, for example; “If any part of such dead body fall upon any sort of seed to be sown, the seed shall be clean, unless, when it fell upon it, the seed had been put in water; for then it shall be unclean to you.” Leviticus xi. 37, 38.

themselves abominable" by eating unclean food ; but it is said ; " Ye shall sanctify yourselves," by abstaining from such food, " and ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy."

The Pharisees, in the time of our Saviour, attached a most superstitious importance to the washing of the hands before meals.* The custom, probably, originated in the purpose of removing any particle of unclean food that might accidentally adhere to them. Our Saviour was, on one occasion, questioned by the Pharisees on account of the neglect of this ceremony by his disciples.† It is unnecessary to give the whole of his reply. He severely reproved them for teaching the commandments of men and making void the commandments of God ; with honoring God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him ; and then, turning from the Pharisees, and calling upon the multitude to attend, he said to them ;

" Hear and understand ! Not that which enters the mouth pollutes a man, but what proceeds from the mouth ; it is that which pollutes a man.

" Afterwards his disciples came to him, and said ; Do you know that the Pharisees were scandalized, when they heard that speech ? But he answered them, Whatever my heavenly Father has not planted [whatever religious doctrine or system of doctrines], is to be rooted up. Leave them to themselves. They are blind leaders of the blind, but when the blind lead the blind, it is to fall headlong. Then Peter said, Explain to us that dark saying ;"—meaning the words that our Saviour addressed to the multitude. These were so foreign from the conceptions that the Jews had derived from the Law, that the Apostles did not know how to understand them. " And Jesus said, Are ye too still without discernment ? Do ye not understand, that what enters the mouth passes into the stomach, and is cast out ? But what proceeds from the mouth has its source in the mind, and is that which pollutes a man. For in the mind is the source of evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false testimony, calumny. These are what pollute a man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not pollute a man."

Perhaps the purpose of the last sentence, in which Jesus recurs to the original occasion of his discourse, was partially to veil from his dis-

* See Wetstein's note on Matthew xv. 2.

† Matthew, Ch. xv. Mark, Ch. vii.

ciples, as yet unprepared for such full instruction, the whole bearing of the truths he had declared, on the authority of the Levitical Law and the Pentateuch. But their bearing is obvious. They are essential truths of religion. They were uttered by Jesus, as a teacher from God ; and they show in what manner he regarded the representations of the Pentateuch concerning clean and unclean animals, and the pollution to be incurred by eating the one, and the holiness to be attained by eating only the other. The fact, that they are in direct opposition to the Levitical Law, is apparent ; but it may be made a little more striking to the imagination, if we will conceive of the astounding incongruity that would be produced, were the words of Jesus to be found in Leviticus or Deuteronomy, immediately after the ordinances respecting clean and unclean food.

Christianity is distinguished by the indissoluble sanctity that it attaches to marriage ;—strikingly distinguished, when we consider the general licentiousness of principle, as well as practice, among Jews and Heathens, regarding the intercourse of the sexes, which prevailed before the coming of our Saviour. The sacred character with which marriage is invested by our religion is a necessary means of delivering men from the animal selfishness of the appetites, and of educating them as moral and spiritual beings. It transforms the passion of the sexes into a high and generous sentiment, that puts in action and invigorates whatever is noble in our nature. It makes it the foundation of the most intimate friendship. Though the sanctity of marriage has been but imperfectly regarded by Christians, yet its effects have been, to raise woman from the state to which she was degraded by the vices of the ancient world, and is still degraded wherever the influence of Christianity is unknown, and to establish her in her proper rank. It has placed the weaker and more refined portion of our race on an equality with the stronger and ruder, and thus caused the purifying and civilizing influence of female virtue to be everywhere diffused. By making the union of parents indissoluble, it secures to their children care and love. It has infused a new vitality into the ties of natural affection ; and these, in their numberless ramifications and interlacings, become the strongest bonds of civil society. It has created domestic life, the close union of individuals into families, the school in which our virtues are

now formed in childhood, and the sphere in which our best charities are exercised in maturer years.

But the sanctity of marriage was not recognised in the Levitical Law. It presents in this respect a great contrast with the teaching of Christ. It countenanced the widest liberty of divorce on the part of the husband. If a wife "had not favor in the eyes of her husband, because he had found something offensive in her," he might "write her a bill of divorcement, and put it into her hands, and send her out of his house."* It was in direct opposition to this law (which is, obviously, from the mention of *writing* a bill of divorcement, of an age when writing had become common), that is, it was in direct opposition to the Levitical Law, that our Saviour thus taught ;

"It has been said ; Let him who would put away his wife, give her a writing of divorcement. But I say to you, Whoever puts away his wife, except for adultery, causes her to commit adultery ; and whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery."†

In the time of our Saviour, the majority of the Jews inferred, as they were authorized to do, from the Levitical Law, that a man might divorce his wife for any cause of offence whatever. The Pharisees, who had, doubtless, heard something of his teaching respecting this subject, were desirous that it should be brought out in still more open opposition to the Law, that it might afford them an opportunity to excite against him the prejudices of the multitude. They, accordingly, came to question him on the subject, and made their inquiry with a show of deference. The Evangelist thus relates ;

"And the Pharisees came to ensnare him, and asked ; May a man lawfully divorce his wife for whatever cause he will ? And he answered them ; Have ye not read, that the Creator, in the beginning, made a male and a female ? And it is said ; *For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife ; and they two shall be one.* So they are no longer two, but one. What, then, God has joined together, let none put asunder. They said to him, Why, then, has Moses ordained, that a man may give his wife a writing of divorcement, and put her away ? He said to them, Moses, on account of your perversity, allowed you to put away your wives ; but in the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, that whoever puts away his wife,

* Deuteronomy, xxiv. 1.

† Matthew v. 31, 32.

except for adultery, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her who has been put away commits adultery.”*

Here, again, our Saviour directly opposes his teaching to the Levitical law; not, it should be observed, on the ground that that Law had proceeded from God, but that he was commissioned to revoke it; on the contrary, he declares the Law itself, in the particular in question, essentially bad, and contrary to the will of God. In the words, “Moses, on account of your perversity, allowed you to put away your wives,” we are to consider the *essential* idea, which is, that the law had its occasion in the perversity of the Jews. The expression, “Moses allowed,” is merely an adaptation of his language to the popular belief, concerning which any direct controversy would have defeated the purpose he had in view. But, while using this expression, Jesus, at the same time, affords decisive ground for concluding the belief to be erroneous. If the law respecting divorce proceeded from Moses, it proceeded from God. But a law cannot have proceeded from God which is contrary to the will of God, and accommodated to human perversity; a law that counteracts the moral civilization of men, and indulges them in selfishness, sensuality and domestic tyranny. It is to be recollected, that the code which contained this law likewise presented a broad contrast to Christianity in sanctioning polygamy and concubinage. How different the teaching of Jesus was from the notions which the Jews had derived from the Levitical Law, and the practice which they had founded upon it, appears from the remark of his own disciples after his conversation with the Pharisees: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

The first mention by Jesus of the Jewish law respecting divorce is found in the Sermon on the Mount. In this discourse the manner is very striking, in which precepts, or principles, derived from the Pentateuch, are introduced to notice, and remarked on by him, for the purpose of extending or contradicting them. His words are; “Ye have heard that it was said to them of old”—“But I say to you.” This is language which cannot be reconciled with the supposition that Jesus held the common belief of his countrymen, that those precepts and principles proceeded immediately from God. Introduce the expression of such a belief, and it would give a strange character to his words; “Ye have

* Matthew xix. 3-9.

heard that God said to them of old"—"But I say to you." Had he intended to sanction the popular belief, and, at the same time, to signify that he was commissioned to enlarge or repeal the laws formerly given by God, we should find some other forms of introduction than those which he has used; as for example, "God spake by Moses to them of old, saying"—"But my Father now says to you."

The argument we are considering has, perhaps, been sufficiently elucidated. But I will add one passage more. It is from the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, whom he found by Jacob's well.* To her he openly professed himself the Messiah, contrary to the reserve which he was compelled to maintain with the Jews till the closing scenes of his ministry. To her, likewise, he spoke with more plainness in relation to the subject before us. She, believing him to be a prophet, questioned him at once respecting the fundamental point of difference between the Jews and Samaritans; Whether God should be worshipped on Mount Gerizim, or at Jerusalem. About the form of worship, which was essentially the same in the temple of the Samaritans and in that of the Jews, there was no question in her mind. But it is to this form of worship that the answer of Jesus relates. "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when ye shall worship the Father neither on this mountain nor at Jerusalem." I pass over a sentence unimportant to our purpose. "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers of the Father shall worship him in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such worshippers. God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." This passage, viewed in the light in which it has been placed by the preceding inquiry, hardly requires any comment. Those who worshipped, either at Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, according to the rites of the Levitical Law, were not such worshippers as God desired. Their religion of ceremonies was not the religion of the heart. Their form of worship was to be done away, as unacceptable to God; and, in contradistinction to them, a new class of men was forming, through the ministry of Christ, who, rejecting all such rites, should worship God spiritually and truly.

We conclude, then, that the tacit and indirect abolition of the ceremonial Law by Christianity, without any claim on the part of Jesus,

* John iv. 5-24.

that, though this law was of divine origin, he was commissioned to repeal it ;—the opposition between the spirit and character of our religion, and other portions of the Levitical Law ;—and such words and acts of our Saviour as have been mentioned, bearing directly against that Law, —all prove that the popular notions of the Jews respecting its divine origin and authority, and, consequently, their notions respecting the authorship of the Pentateuch, were not sanctioned by him, but were opposed by him as far as a wise regard to the accomplishment of the essential purposes of his ministry would permit.

We will now pass from a consideration of the Pentateuch to some general remarks on the other books of the Old Testament.

SECTION VIII.

On the other Books of the Old Testament beside those of the Pentateuch.

In considering the other books of the Old Testament, we must divest ourselves of the Jewish notion of their divine authority ; or, in other words, we must divest ourselves of the belief, that the truth of all the facts which they relate, and of all the sentiments which their writers express, rests on the authority of God. When viewed under this aspect, they excite constant objections, and present constant occasions of scandal. But, when they are removed from the false light in which they have been placed, so that their true character may be discerned, we perceive them to be works of the greatest curiosity and interest, coming down to us from a remote antiquity ; marking the history of our race with a long track of light, though broken and clouded, where all would be darkness without them ; bearing, in their habitual reference to God, which gives them so peculiar a character, the impress of the divine dispensation in which they had their origin ; and uttering, with the voice of far distant ages, sentiments of piety to which the heart of man still responds.

In regard to the *miscellaneous* books of the Old Testament, as they may be called, to distinguish them from the historical and prophetical, no further remarks seem necessary with reference to our present purpose. But, respecting the other historical books beside the Pentateuch, the inquiry arises ; In what manner should we regard the many

accounts of miracles contained in them, and the language which, to a modern reader, at first view, implies the frequent immediate interposition of the Deity in acting upon the minds of men and directing the order of events?

In considering this question, a distinction is to be made among those books. In the Books of Joshua and of Judges, which relate to the period of several centuries, as is commonly supposed, immediately following the settlement of the Jews in Palestine, there is evidently, I conceive, a great mixture of fabulous traditions, such as are found in the early history of all other nations. With the Book of Samuel, the history, to all appearance, assumes a more authentic character;—far more authentic than that of the contemporary history of any other ancient nation; and it continues to preserve a similar character through the Book of Kings. It is these Books of Samuel and of the Kings, that particularly demand attention in further considering the inquiry just presented.

We will first take notice of those forms of expression to be found in them, which refer so much to the immediate agency of the Deity, though without supposing anything properly miraculous, that is, any event not accordant with the ordinary course of nature, that may be recognised as such an event by man. In the occurrences of this world, much, we believe, is left to the free agency of the moral beings who inhabit it; while, on the other hand, religion and philosophy teach us, that much is determined by the unseen operation of the controlling will of God. But to settle the limits of human and divine agency is a problem which no philosophy can solve. However convinced we may be, that man possesses, as essential to all that is excellent in his nature, the power of doing good as his proper act, and consequently the power of doing evil, we are wholly ignorant how far this power is limited and overruled by God's omnipotence. We believe, as the necessary groundwork of religion and morals, that God, though the ultimate, is not the immediate, cause of all events; and that a wide distinction is to be made between what he directly ordains, and what he permits. But this distinction was overlooked by the Jewish historians. Accustomed to the habitual contemplation of God as the author of all things, deeply penetrated by a sense of the marvellous circumstances under which their nation existed, and regarding it as the object of his special providence, they naturally referred *directly* to him whatever affected its condition,

and whatever seemed to them a manifestation of his pleasure or displeasure. This state of mind they, of course, shared with their countrymen. We have scarcely entered on the Book of Samuel, before we find it related, that "the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" * The same mode of conception and style of narration appear throughout the history. To remark on one of the passages, by which the early fathers were embarrassed, it is said, that "an evil spirit, from the Lord, troubled Saul."† A modern historian might express the same event by saying, that Saul became subject to temporary insanity. A religious man, if he wished to present the fact under a religious aspect, would now say, that in the providence of God Saul was thus afflicted. The last mode of expression would differ from that used by the Jewish historian, not only in putting aside the agency of an evil spirit, but also in not *directly* referring the effect to God. It is to be kept in mind, that in all such language throughout the Jewish history, we have only an expression of the conceptions of the writer. Of the counsels of God he could know nothing.

The next branch of the inquiry is ; In what manner we are to regard the accounts of miracles contained in the Books of Samuel and of the Kings. The Book of the Kings, as has been formerly remarked, was written, or compiled, after the commencement of the Babylonish Captivity. It begins with an account of the last days of David. Between the composition of the history and the first events related in it, was an interval, therefore, of more than four centuries and a half. It has been supposed by many, that the Book of Samuel was originally united with that of the Kings, as forming one work by the same author. But it seems to me most probable, that they are different works by different authors, and I shall continue to speak of them as such. The Book of Samuel has been thought, from internal evidence, to have been written a considerable time after the conclusion of the series of historical events which it records, and these events extend through a period of about a hundred and fifty years.

In the Books of Samuel and of the Kings, we find many accounts of supposed miracles, in the proper sense of the word. In regard to such accounts, we must recollect, that we are wholly ignorant of the writer of either work ; that, consequently, we know nothing concerning either

* 1 Samuel iv. 3.

† 1 Samuel xvi. 14.

writer to justify any peculiar confidence in his habits of investigation, his judgment, or his trustworthiness; that neither of them gave his testimony under personal circumstances that might tend to confirm it; that each of them wrote so long after many or most of the events which he narrates, that tradition might have done her common work in introducing fables, and changing natural events into marvels; and that both of them lived in that stage of civilization in which men are prone to the belief of the supernatural, and among a people in whom this tendency had been especially strengthened. The miracles by which the dispensation of Moses was confirmed, whatever they were, must have been such as deeply to affect the imaginations of the Israelites. It is the necessary consequence of a miraculous dispensation, to render men's minds familiar with the idea of the special manifestation of divine power, and to dispose them for a long time to acquiesce in the belief of supposed instances of such a manifestation. The case may naturally have been the same with the miracles of Moses, as it was with those of Christ and his Apostles. The former, as well as the latter, may have given occasion to many accounts of false miracles, such as we find in the works of the Christian fathers, particularly of the later fathers. There is nothing to render it probable, that the writers of the Jewish nation were less likely to fall into error than those of the Christian church. While no one, who puts aside the notion of the divine authority of all the books of the ancient Hebrews, can doubt, that extravagant fables and false prodigies are found in all those relating to that portion of their history which precedes the time of Samuel, while the whole history of the ancient world is full of pretended marvels, there seems no reason to except the Books of Samuel and of the Kings as free from this mixture. These views of the subject, it may seem, will justify us in rejecting altogether the accounts of miracles which they contain.

I think not. There is a different view to be taken. The considerations suggested will, undoubtedly, justify us in rejecting without hesitation all such accounts as clearly appear to us to imply wrong conceptions of God, and in regarding others, of not so marked a character, with great skepticism. But those considerations have no bearing on another question that arises; Whether it were possible, that the great end for which the Jews were preserved a separate people could have been accomplished, had there been no other miracles attesting the peculiar relation of that people to God, than those which accompanied

their separation by Moses. When we recollect, that they were a small people surrounded by an idolatrous world, and often lapsing into idolatry themselves; when we recollect, that we are looking back to a period of history, when the idea of God, in its rudest form, was unknown to the generality of men, we may well doubt, whether a succession of miracles was not necessary to preserve it among the Jews. But, were this the case, there is no presumption against their occurrence. On the contrary, we must believe that the necessary means were used by God to effect the purpose intended by him. I am reasoning throughout, as is apparent, without reference to that philosophy, as shallow, in my view, as it is irreligious, according to which God is bound by his own wisdom, or by some other necessity of his nature, not to manifest himself to men for any end whatever, except through those operations of his power which we call the laws of nature.

Believing, then, that God may have wrought miracles among the Israelites subsequently to the time of Moses, we shall find in their historical books some accounts which there seems little reason to question. Let us turn, for example, to the eighteenth chapter of the first book of Kings. Amid the general idolatry of the kingdom of Israel under Ahab, after the slaughter, by Jezebel, of the prophets of the Lord, Elijah appears from his retirement, to present himself before the king. "And when Ahab saw Elijah, he said, Art thou he who troubles Israel? And Elijah answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in forsaking the commandments of Jehovah and following false gods." The whole demeanour of the persecuted prophet corresponds to this fearless expression of high and unshrinking dignity. He demands an assembly of the people, before whom the many hundreds of the prophets of Baal, and of the groves, should meet him alone. In the presence of the assembled nation, he appeals to God for his decision: "Lord! God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Hear me, O Lord! hear me, that this people may know, that thou the Lord art God. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the earth, and licked up the water that was in the trench."

The credibility of this account is confirmed by the essential importance of the occasion on which this miracle is said to have been performed, when the religion of God was trampled down by a persecuting idolatry. It is confirmed by the extraordinary publicity asserted for it,

as wrought in the presence of an assembled people, during a period of authentic history. But the noble presentation of moral grandeur in the situation and character of the prophet, and the transcendent magnificence of the description, vivid with all the marks of truth, are alone, perhaps, sufficient to create a presumption of the reality of the event, scarcely less strong than their immediate effect on the imagination and feelings. More, however, than all this, we have the most solemn attestation to the fact, that Elijah was a special messenger of God. In the Transfiguration of our Saviour, Elijah appeared in company with Moses, as associated with Jesus. Elijah, then, was a prophet of God; and, as a prophet of God, his mission had been sealed by miracles; and what miracle can we imagine more suited to his character, as a teacher and restorer of true religion among the idolatrous Israelites, than that described by the historian?

These considerations, however, do not prove, that all which is related concerning Elijah is to be received as it is told. I have before remarked, that the occurrence of real miracles has a tendency to give rise to false reports of miracles, and to procure credit for such stories. Counterfeit coin circulates with the true. It is a very striking proof of the authenticity and genuineness of the Gospels, that, among the many narratives which they contain of miracles performed by Jesus, there are none, the intrinsic character of which may suggest a well-grounded doubt of their credibility. It is an equally striking evidence of the authority which these books obtained from the beginning, that they thoroughly checked the growth of all fabulous narratives of miracles as wrought by him during his ministry. It is only a confirmation of the force of this argument, that a crop of fabulous marvels relating to his infancy and childhood, of which some seed seems to have been early scattered, sprung up after the fourth century, and flourished during the dark ages. These fables are still to be found in the Gospels of the Infancy (before mentioned), and other books of the same class, and some of them in the Koran.

In regard to the history of the Jews, I believe that the concerns of that nation, like those of all other nations and individuals, were under the special providence of God, by which term, sometimes abused,—as what term of religion has not been?—I mean an agency of God that is undiscernible by man in the particular instances of its operation, which is apart from, and, if I may so speak, lies behind, the ordinary

concatenation of causes and effects, that alone falls under our cognizance, and which veils it from our view ; but an agency by which the condition of God's creatures in this world is continually affected. Beside this special providence, we have seen what reasons there are for believing that miracles, subsequent to those of Moses, made a part of the Jewish dispensation. This fact is not only consistent with the supposition, that in the Jewish books of history there are many accounts of miracles not to be credited, but, considering all the circumstances under which those books were composed, it would naturally lead us, before examination, to anticipate that such would be the case. The conclusion, that in the Jewish histories there are many accounts of miracles not to be credited, has no bearing whatever on our religious faith, our morals, or our happiness, except one that is very important ; it relieves the mind from all the perplexity, confusion, and religious skepticism, produced by the inconsistency of those accounts with just conceptions of the Divinity.

After what has been said, it is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to observe, that there is nothing in the character of the Jewish historians to qualify them to be guides in religion or morals. On these subjects they shared in the rude and erroneous notions of their countrymen, which were far in advance of those of the heathen world, but far behind those of an enlightened Christian. We are not called upon to adopt their moral judgments, expressed or implied, respecting characters or actions. Nor is it improbable, that they, or the earlier relators whom they followed, were influenced in their representations by personal or party prejudices. These remarks may seem to some too obvious to be thus formally stated ; but we are not a century removed from the time, when the credibility of revelation was thought to be involved in the proof, that David was *a man after God's own heart*, because the anonymous author of the Book of Samuel represents Samuel as using this expression concerning him.

We pass to the prophetical books. The prophets were the public religious teachers of the Jews. This was their distinguishing characteristic. The true prophets conscientiously addressed their countrymen as ministers of God. It was their business to instruct, warn, threaten, exhort, and encourage the people.

These were the true prophets ; but the name "prophet" was

equally extended to those who dishonestly, and with bad purposes, assumed the character of teachers of the national religion. Thus we find mention of false prophets as well as true. It was given to those also who taught the worship of idols, as we read, for instance, of the prophets of Baal. The leading idea to be formed of a prophet is that of a public religious teacher, whether honest or dishonest, whether the professed minister of the true God or of some false god. In our own language the word "prophet" is now restricted to denoting, in its proper sense, one miraculously commissioned to foretell events. It is too late to change the name as applied to the Jewish teachers; but if we would avoid error we must give it the additional meaning just explained. It would be a great extravagance, to suppose that all those called prophets in the Old Testament were regarded as possessing the miraculous power of foretelling events, or as making pretensions to this power.

The prophets whose writings remain, in addressing the Jewish people, often insisted on the certain or probable consequences of their sins; on impending dangers, which could be avoided only, if at all, by a return to their duty; on the blessings which would follow reformation and goodness; on the mercy of God as about to be displayed in some approaching deliverance; and on that constant faith which the Jews, as his chosen people, might repose on his providence, if obedient to his will. It is the office of every teacher of religion and virtue to look to the future, and to point out the consequences of conduct. The imaginations of the prophets were strongly affected by a sense of the connection of the Jewish nation with God. They described this connection in the strongest terms. They spoke of the nation in a figure hardly agreeable to our ears, when we suffer the mind to dwell upon it, as *God's inheritance*, or peculiar possession. Viewing it as existing through its past and anticipated history, they personified it as Israel, *his servant, his son, the child whom he had loved*, who might be chastised for the sins of a particular generation, but whose enemies and oppressors were to be destroyed, and for whom a future glory, as yet unknown, was in reserve. Thus their writings often assumed the form of prediction. The prophets, also, as ministers of God, were accustomed, with the licensed boldness of oriental poetry, to introduce God as through themselves addressing the people, and to represent their declarations of what they believed conformable to his will and purposes, as imme-

diately suggested by him. Their language in these respects, though different in the turn of expression, was the same, in meaning and effect, with that which has been uttered from Christian pulpits down to our own time; and that which every religious and moral teacher may or must use when he believes himself to be stating what it indisputably the law of God.

It is clear, that there is much in the language, conceptions, and sentiments of the authors of the prophetic books (so called), which is not to be referred directly to God; and so far as we have proceeded in our remarks on them, we may proceed with assurance. But there are good reasons for entertaining the question, Whether some of their number were not occasionally employed as ministers of God under his immediate direction, and endued with the power of predicting events directly revealed to them by him. In the supposition that they were so, there is nothing intrinsically incredible; and such may have been the fact, even though no conclusive evidence of it now remain. We cannot expect to be able to ascertain all that has taken place in the extraordinary, any more than in the ordinary, manifestations of God. But the question, as regards our own belief, is simply, Whether we have sufficient evidence of the truth of this supposition, or whether the balance of probabilities inclines for or against it. In the opinion which has commonly prevailed relating to this subject, much has been assumed without proof; there has been a great want of critical inquiry, and of logical and well-grounded reasoning. On the other hand, the opinion directly opposed to it has been rested chiefly on a principle, destructive of any belief in revelation, and of any religious sentiment toward God as a personal being, or rather of any belief in the God of Christianity; I mean the principle, that rejects all extraordinary interpositions of God, and regards the power that governs the universe as capable only of a sort of mechanical action;—God and matter being equally controlled by certain inevitable laws, the Laws of Nature.

The subject deserves a much more thorough and judicious examination than it has received; an examination to be carried through successfully only by one who unites the qualifications of a true Christian philosopher, a wide thinker, an able reasoner, an enlightened critic, and a laborious and accurate scholar. Its result might, perhaps, attain a high degree of probability. It might at least present us with all that can now be known on the subject. But in the mean time,

if our opinions must remain more or less uncertain, it is an uncertainty that in no way affects our virtue or happiness.

The direct evidences of the divine authority of our religion have been divided into miracles and prophecies. But it is obvious, that a prophecy is only a miracle of a particular kind, and that, however clear and satisfactory, it can carry with it no peculiar proof, different from that afforded by any other miracle. In order that a prophecy may be received as evidence, its supernatural character must be unquestionable. There must be no doubt respecting either its meaning, or its correspondence with the event predicted, or its intended reference to that event. There must be no mode of accounting for the correspondence between the prophecy and the event, except by referring the former to the omniscience of God. These conditions are not, as I conceive, fulfilled by those passages of the Old Testament which have been alleged as prophecies of Jesus. The Jews, interpreting the Old Testament allegorically, had applied many passages in it to their expected Messiah. A portion of the disciples of Jesus (apparently not all) retained the common notions of their countrymen respecting this subject, and we accordingly find some of those passages applied to him in the Gospel of Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. In what is reported concerning the conversations of our Saviour, there are some expressions that may require explanation;* but he never appeals in evidence of his divine mission to any words of a Jewish prophet, as containing a miraculous prediction.

The writers of the prophetical books undoubtedly believed, that the series of God's dispensations to their nation was not completed; that something greater was in reserve for it; that all the marvellous preparation which had been made was to produce other results than what had yet taken place. This belief gathered strength in after times. The chosen people, harrassed and subjugated, could not but look forward to some miraculous interposition, by which God would at last manifest his purposes toward them and toward the world. They were expecting the appearance of that great minister, by whom those purposes would be accomplished,—the Anointed One, the Messiah. This messenger came. The object of his coming was unlike what they had an-

* I have formerly adverted to this subject in an article published in "The Christian Examiner," Vol. v. for 1828, pp. 53-59.

ticipated; the kingdom which he was to establish was not that which they had looked for; the results, as regarded their own nation, were altogether different. But he was the long-expected Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He had come to fulfil the purpose of the Jewish dispensation. Our Saviour accomplished not any express prophecy relating to him, but he came in conformity to an expectation, which the whole tenor of God's providence toward their nation had taught the Jews to entertain.

The main purpose of these remarks on the books treated of in this Section, as well as of those on the Pentateuch, has been to show, that these writings, when their character is properly understood, afford no ground of objection to the Jewish or Christian dispensation. But the subject suggests some other reflections, to which we will attend in the next Section.

SECTION IX.

Concluding Remarks upon the Old Testament.

In one of the most popular of the works introductory to the books of the Old Testament, written by a late prelate of the Church of England, they are spoken of as forming "that consecrated canon, in which the holy oracles were preserved by the Jews, which was stamped as infallible by the testimony of Christ and his apostles, and which, in the first and purest ages of the church, was revered (together with the inspired books of the New Testament) as the only source of revealed wisdom." *

Such, in conformity with the creeds of different churches and sects, has been the language of many theologians respecting the Old Testament. They have represented it as having proceeded miraculously from God himself, the human writers being agents of the Divine Mind, in the same manner as a divine origin has been ascribed by the Hindoos to their Vedas and other sacred books, by the Mahometans to the Koran, and by the Parsees to the Zend-Avesta. They have, in consequence, received the accounts, given in its different books, of the Deity,

* Gray's Key to the Old Testament, Preface.

of his acts, and of his communications to the Israelites, as constituting a revelation which he has made of his character. They have regarded the moral judgments which those writings express or imply, as conformed to the highest standard of benevolence and justice, and as affording the most authoritative directions for our own conduct. And they have viewed all the events related, however legendary some of them may appear, as not only possible but certain; and, so far as they pretend to a supernatural character, as altogether worthy of God. At the same time they have rejected those expedients by which the early catholic Christians modified their belief, and attempted to reconcile it with the actual character of the books of the Old Testament.

When we compare the modern, unqualified doctrine concerning those books, with that more complex one held by the generality of the early Christians, on the one hand, or with the opinion of the Gnostics, on the other, it is not easy to say which of the three is most irrational. We marvel at ancient errors; for our wonder has not been deadened by familiarity; but false doctrines prevail in our own time, which, if we were a little further removed from their sphere, would appear to us not less amazing. The history of opinions concerning religion comprehends the whole history of the most portentous absurdities, and the most pernicious errors, into which mankind have fallen. In the history of Christian theology, we find these errors and absurdities clustering round the essential truths of religion, concealing them from view, and counteracting and annihilating their influence. We cannot here inquire into all the causes which have produced this state of things; but we may observe, that one occasion of the prevalence of error, and of the obstinacy with which it has been maintained, is to be found in the essential character of religion itself.

The truths of religion relate to our spiritual nature, to the government of God, to the unseen world, to eternity, to the Infinite Being. Now these are all subjects which, in many of their aspects and relations, not only lie beyond the limits of our knowledge, but transcend our power of comprehension. We cannot, for instance, grasp the idea of infinity; we can only conceive of it negatively, as the absence of all limitation. Of propositions concerning it, directly contradictory, we can neither affirm nor deny one nor the other. Who will say, that created things may or may not have existed from eternity? Who will affirm, that

creation does not imply a commencement of existence? Who will maintain, that the power of creation has not always been an attribute of the Deity, and may not from eternity have been exercised by him? Who will say, that the universe does or does not exist within circumscribed limits, surrounded on all sides by an infinite expanse of void space? Who will contend, on the one hand, that things finite and bounded in their nature must not lie within definite bounds; or, on the other hand, that there are definite bounds beyond which God has not manifested, and cannot manifest, his power and goodness? In attempting to answer consistently questions concerning subjects like these, our reason finds a barrier which it cannot pass. Nor are these the only, nor the most interesting, class of questions respecting the objects of religion, which require for their solution other knowledge, or other powers, than what we possess. The consideration of such questions may teach us, that it is an important part of our wisdom, "to know how little can be known;" to

"Wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore."

To a being of a higher order, how incongruous must it appear, that man,—a creature just formed; but a short while ago a helpless infant, or an ignorant child; whose imperfect faculties are the growth of a few years; whose understanding is so liable to be deceived by the errors of others, and perverted by the meaner part of his own nature; who so often errs in judgment concerning the objects immediately around him; whose knowledge of the Creation, its past history through illimitable time, and its inexhaustible modes of being through illimitable space, is that of a stranger just introduced into it, just learning its language, and confined to a circuit of a few miles,—that man, so very ignorant and incapable, should undertake to solve the problem of the Universe, and to discuss, as if the subject lay all within his comprehension, the character, counsels, and works of the Infinite Being. The essential truths of religion we know, for they have been taught us by God through Christ, and this knowledge is of inestimable value; but beyond and around them is a region into which we cannot penetrate. Yet this region men have attempted to explore, and have returned from it with their reason so baffled and confounded, as to be incapable of discerning the real character of familiar objects, and comprehending the true meaning of words. In this state of mind they have come to the

examination of subjects, related to their faith, of which the human understanding is fully cognizant. Finding, that in the nature of things there were problems connected with religion which they could not solve, they have been ready to acquiesce in verbal or moral absurdities concerning it, the fictions of human folly, as if the latter were of the same character with the former. But true philosophy will teach us to keep in mind the limits of those powers which God has given us, equally in respect to what lies within our capacity, as what lies beyond it.

The error that has been committed in representing the books of the Old Testament as of divine origin and authority, or, in other words, as constituting an essential part of a revelation from God, which error, of course, involves the belief, that it is a fundamental doctrine of religion so to regard those books, has, beyond question, been a most serious hindrance to all rational belief of the fact, that God has miraculously revealed himself to man,—the fact of incomparably the most interest in the history of our race. It is this fact which connects man with God, and the present life with the unseen and eternal. By introducing the supernatural into the natural world it unites them into one system, and changes the aspect of all things around us, spreading over them a light from Heaven. The immediate action of the Deity intervening in the course of human affairs, has brought the proofs of religion fully within the scope of our comprehension and powers of reasoning. Every one may understand the evidences of Christianity. And it is the revelation that God has made of himself by Christianity, which presents the overpowering and unfathomable idea of the Infinite Spirit under those aspects in which alone it may be comprehended by us. It brings God to our view in his relations to man, as the Father of the Universe. To a Christian, religion is not a subject of “lawless and uncertain thoughts,” bewildered in the mazes of speculation. Revelation has given fixedness to his conceptions of God, of immortality, and of responsibility. It has exhibited the objects of religion in their proper relation to the things of this life, and invested them with their true character, as the most solemn of realities ; while without it the shadows of this world, as our years pass away, assume shapes more and more fearful.

It is on Christianity, as a miraculous revelation, that religion must

rest as its principal and only safe support. If Jesus Christ spoke with authority from God, attested by supernatural displays of God's power, we need look for no further evidence of all that is essential to our faith,—of all that is essential to our happiness as spiritual and immortal beings. But if we reject Christianity, we cannot fall back even on the uncertainty which preceded it in the Pagan world; for this uncertainty is rendered darker and more gloomy by the supposition, that God (or the Power, whatever it may be, that acts throughout the Universe) has left the most enlightened portion of mankind to found their religious hopes on a delusion, and by the consequent distrust, which must necessarily be produced, in all the efforts of man's reason to attain any satisfactory conclusions respecting the objects of religion.

It is to Christianity, then, that we must look as the main source of human improvement and happiness. It is in her cause that the battle between good and evil is to be fought. But, in order that we may successfully maintain our religion, we must have a clear conception of what it is, and of what it is not. Pure Christianity is pure religion and pure morality; but what characterizes it as Christianity is, that it rests the evidence of the truths essential to the virtue and happiness of man on the attestation of God; and that in the very fact which it supposes of his miraculous interposition,—that in this fact alone, it affords a most glorious exemplification and proof of the truths which it teaches concerning his paternal character, and his purposes toward us. But, under the much abused name of Christianity, superstition has sheltered great errors, doctrines alien from its spirit, contradictory to its essential truths, revolting to reason, and even doctrines utterly outraging justice and humanity,—the doctrines of religious tyranny and persecution. Many of these errors, embodied in the creeds of churches and sects, and in the decrees of councils, still burden the Christian world. It is to their public renunciation, however distant the period of it may be, that we must look for any great improvement in the moral and religious condition of men. Then the force of the evidences of our faith may be far more widely recognised, and its proper influence, uncounteracted by those errors, may be far more generally felt. But, in the meantime, there is for every one a consideration which even more intimately concerns him. The more correct are his own conceptions of Christianity, and the more strong is his own conviction of its truth,

the greater power will it have to elevate his character ; to enable him to live wisely and honorably, and, if no severe trials be appointed him, happily ; to make him useful to those he loves, and to all whom he may serve ; and to prepare him for that higher state of being, of which Christianity alone can give him any assurance.

NOTE E.

(See pp. 198, 223, 238, and 248.)

ON THE DISTINCTION MADE BY THE ANCIENTS BETWEEN THINGS *INTELLIGIBLE* AND THINGS *SENSIBLE*; ON THE USE OF THE TERMS *SPIRITUAL* AND *MATERIAL* AS APPLIED TO THEIR SPECULATIONS; AND ON THE NATURE OF MATTER.

THE division of substances into material and spiritual, which is so familiar to us, was not equally familiar to the ancients. Instead of this Plato and his followers adopted another. They divided all beings into *sensible*, or those perceptible by the senses, and *intelligible*, or those which are the objects of the intellect alone. To the latter class, Plato assigned all general ideas, those derived from sensible objects, as well as others ; not regarding these ideas, however, as mere conceptions either of the human or of the divine mind, but as proper separate existences, endued with life and divinity. They constituted his archetypal world, the *intelligible* world, after the model of which was formed the *sensible* world, the material universe. For example, goodness, beauty, unity, number, equality, roundness, whiteness, are, according to him, all of them beings existing apart in the perfect world of archetypal Ideas. But these Ideas are not merely the patterns of sensible things ; they likewise form their essences. They communicate themselves to matter, and thus cause sensible things to be good, beautiful, one or many, equal, round, and white. But matter but imperfectly receives, and renders back, the impression of these archetypes, these ideal forms, which can be discerned only by the eye of the mind. They, when compared with the material things which bear their likeness, are the only real existences. Of these archetypes, the objects of the senses are but

shadowy and fleeting resemblances, coming into existence and perishing, but having no proper being. Or, to express what has been said in the words of Cicero, "*Nihil* Plato putat esse, quod oriatur et intereat, idque solum *esse*, quod semper tale sit, qualem *ideam* appellat ille, nos *speciem*." *

This is an outline of the doctrine of Plato. But it may be well to enter into a little further explanation of it.

Plato, in his *Timæus*, † after maintaining that the created world is a living being, ‡ goes on to infer, that the pattern after which it was formed, the intelligible world of Ideas, is a perfect living being, "comprehending in itself all intelligible living beings, in the same manner as this world contains us and all other visible animals." Afterwards, he speaks of this world, with express reference to its pattern, as being "an image of the eternal gods," § that is, of the eternal Ideas after which it was formed; and, in the conclusion of the Dialogue, he calls the world "a visible living being comprehending the visible animals, a sensible god, the image of the intelligible."

Cudworth, who wished to believe that Plato's intelligible world was merely an ideal image of the future creation, preëxisting in the mind of the Deity, says, that, "Plato himself speaking obscurely of this intelligible world, and the ideas of it, no wonder if many of his Pagan followers have absurdly made so many distinct animals and gods of them." || But it seems unreasonable in the present case to bring the charge of obscurity against Plato. It is difficult to perceive, how he could have expressed himself more explicitly; or how language plainer than what he has used can have been used by his followers.

Cudworth afterwards says, "It was a monstrous extravagancy of some of the later Platonists to suppose the Ideas all of them to be so many distinct substances and animals;" and, after remarking that this doctrine has been imputed to Plato himself by Tertullian and others, he adds; "Neither can it be denied, but that there are some odd expressions in Plato, sounding that way, who therefore may not be justified in this, nor I think in some other conceits of his, concerning these Ideas: as

* Tusculan. Disputat. Lib. i. § 24.

† P. 30.

‡ *Zôon*, animal, living being. The word has been commonly translated "animal;" but it would seem that our modern associations with the latter term should be avoided.

§ P. 37.

|| Intellectual System, Ch. iv. § 32. p. 499. Original folio Ed.

when he contends, that they are not only the objects of science, but also the proper and physical causes of all things here below; as, for example, that the Ideas of similitude and dissimilitude are the causes of the likeness and unlikeness of all things to one another by their participation of them. Nevertheless, it cannot be at all doubted, but that Plato himself, and most of his followers, very well understood, that these Ideas were, all of them, really nothing else but the *noēmata*, or conceptions, of that one perfect Intellect, which was their second hypostasis [the second person of their Trinity]; and, therefore, they could not look upon them in good earnest, as so many distinct substances existing severally and apart by themselves out of any mind, however they were guilty of some extravagant expressions concerning them.”*

Such is the view of the subject taken by Cudworth; but he adduces no evidence in support of his assertion, that it cannot be doubted that Plato and most of his followers did not mean what they appear to mean.†

* Intellectual System, Ch. iv. § 36. pp. 562, 563.

† Mosheim in his Latin Translation of Cudworth (i. 856, 857), has a note on the passage just quoted, in which he argues for the opinion asserted by Cudworth, and held by some other modern writers, that the Ideas of Plato were only ideas in the common sense of the word, existing (primarily) in the Divine Mind. But it is difficult to determine what was Mosheim’s prevailing belief on the subject. He does not claim to be confident, and he certainly was not consistent, in holding the opinion, which, in this note, he undertakes to defend; and the character of the note itself is such as to excite some suspicion, that his true purpose in it was to express indirectly his strong sense of the absurdity of what he recognized to be the real doctrine of Plato.

He says, that Cudworth “learnedly proves” his assertion; whereas Cudworth hardly makes a show of bringing any proof of it. He himself produces no passage from Plato in support of the position which he professes to maintain. He offers nothing but a general and very unsatisfactory explanation of the representations of Plato which are irreconcilable with it; and he takes notice, without attempting to controvert it, of the all but decisive authority of Aristotle, who ascribes to Plato the doctrine of Ideas subsisting by themselves. His sole argument, on which he is evidently not unwilling to employ much strength of language, is simply this, that what has been represented to be the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, is a doctrine too irrational to be ascribed to any intelligent man. “If I find,” he says, “an opinion ascribed to a man not deficient in capacity or learning, which is clearly absurd and foolish, and which is not necessarily connected with his other doctrines, I shall not readily be persuaded that no injustice is done him, although some passages may be pro-

Plato represents his archetypal Ideas as having been contemplated by God in the work of creation. In like manner, he represents them

duced from him, which seem clearly to prove the charge." . . . "But the opinion which Plato is said to have held is so absurd and ridiculous, that, were it explained in proper and plain words, every one not wholly destitute of understanding would perceive its inanity and folly."

But the doctrine which Mosheim here represents as so irrational, he expressly ascribes to Plato in another note, following at no great distance. "If I am not wholly deceived," he says (p. 869), "the eternal gods of Plato are no other than the eternal patterns and species of all things, conformably to which Plato conceived this world to have been formed by the Supreme Divinity." "Plato so speaks of these eternal gods, that it is apparent, that he meant natures apart and separate from the highest God, to whom he ascribes the formation of the world." Further on (p. 900), Mosheim recurs to the opinion first professed by him; that is, he says, that "as he has before professed, he is inclined to the opinion, that the eternal patterns of things are not to be separated from God himself, except by an act of thought." But, in the very note from which this is quoted, he also says, that "nothing can be plainer," than that Plato, in his *Timæus*, "distinctly separates his eternal species or Ideas from the Maker of the World;" he denies, that Plato in that work taught the doctrine held by the later Platonists, of three hypostases in the Divinity; he maintains, that Plato "knew of no other principal God except the Maker of the World," and affirms, that "every one acquainted with the Platonic philosophy will agree, that Plato did not place his eternal patterns and species of things in the principal person" of that Trinity which he has been imagined to have taught.

Whether Mosheim's strong sense of the absurdity of Plato's doctrine of Ideas did in fact lead him to vacillate in his opinion of what Plato intended; or whether he did not care to express his real sentiments concerning that doctrine without throwing a veil over them, are questions not easy to decide. Nor is one assisted in forming a decision by two other notes (pp. 840-846), in which he professedly attempts to exculpate even the later Platonists from meaning what they said concerning hypostatized, or animate and deified, Ideas. "It seems to me," he observes, "that their language is to be understood in a less objectionable sense than what the words at first sight seem to require; for these, if taken in their ordinary signification, would manifest the greatest folly." It may be made a question, however, whether it is less to the credit of a writer to be a mystic and to write mystically, or to have intelligible ideas, but to be unable or unwilling to put them forth without giving them the air of absurdities.

Mosheim was of a higher order of intellect than the modern expositors of Plato among his countrymen with whom I am acquainted. The German mind, as it has been lately exhibited, has, for the most part, shown itself unqualified for the explanation of ancient philosophy. For this, the power of distinguishing between sense and nonsense is an essential requisite. But, in the later expositions of the Platonic philosophy to which I refer, ancient and modern mysticism have run

as having been contemplated by the souls of men in their preëxistent state.* As being the generic forms of things, he regarded them as the only objects of *true* knowledge. The acquisition of such knowledge consists, according to him, in awakening the reminiscences of them lying dormant in the mind. His doctrine, often repeated, was, that "Our learning is nothing but recollection."† This doctrine that the true knowledge possessed by the mind is not here acquired, but only recollected, was his main argument for the preëxistence of the soul, with which his doctrine of its immortality was intimately connected.‡ The following is a passage from the Phædo; "What, then, asked Socrates, do you say concerning that doctrine which we advanced, that learning is recollection: and that, this being so, our soul must necessarily have

together, and form strange combinations, in which, however, the modern element preponderates. Tennemann, in his different works, has converted the Athenian philosopher into a German metaphysician. In his hands, Plato's Ideas become ideas of Pure Reason (in the dialect of Kant), "not having their origin in experience, but in the nature of the soul:" "the Divine idea being the object of the human, the first intelligible object of the reason." (Geschichte der Philosophie, ii. 252, 371.) But, however uninformative may be Tennemann's accounts of Plato's philosophy, we shall perceive that we have made a descent in the region of intellect, when we pass from them to that of the later historian of philosophy, Ritter. His exposition of it has the characteristics which belong to the writings of many of his countrymen at the present day. The conceptions are so obscure and unformed, there is such want of skill in the use of language, the modes of expression are so imperfect, and the terms so undefined in their signification, that the show of meaning presented continually eludes us, and we proceed like travellers following a mirage in a desert. One may judge of his incapacity for thinking clearly by the degree in which he fancies himself to understand such writers.

One of the latest German expositors of Plato, Stallbaum, in the Prolegomena to his edition of the Parmenides (p. 4), after saying that he shall "aim at the greatest perspicuity of thought and expression, and not endeavour to gain the praise of talent or learning by subtile commentaries remote from the truth," proceeds thus to give a character of his fellow laborers; "Grassari sane hoc malum,"—the evil of giving subtile commentaries remote from the truth—"nostrâ ætate cœpit incredibiliter; id quod ipsi facile animadvertimus in legendis iis scriptis, quæ nuper de Parmenide Platónico edita sunt. In quibus, profecto, sæpenumero ambigas, magisne mireris fingendi comminiscendique impudentiam, an Latini et Germanici sermonis spurcitiem, quæ apud quosdam tanta est, ut ne unam quidem sententiam reperiās, quæ non turpissimis inquinata sit balbutientis barbariæ vitiis."

* Phædrus, p. 247, seqq.

† Phædo, p. 72.

‡ Phædo, pp. 72-77. Meno, p. 81, seqq.

existed somewhere else before it was confined in the body? I was thoroughly convinced of it, said Cebes, and am not more assured of any thing. And I, said Simmias, am of the same opinion."*

Conformably to the passages which I have quoted from the *Timæus*, Plato uniformly describes his Ideas, or the generic forms of things, as *subsisting by themselves*. Thus he teaches, that there "is a certain Fire [the generic Idea of Fire] subsisting by itself,† and so with regard to all other things of which we constantly speak as subsisting by themselves."‡ "There is one form of being," he says, "always the same, unproduced and indestructible, neither receiving any thing foreign into itself, nor passing to any thing without itself, not perceptible by the sight nor by any of the senses, which it belongs to the intellect to contemplate;"—and with this he proceeds immediately to contrast those forms of being, its similitudes, which exist in the sensible world. § As I have before said, he uniformly regards these Ideas, when compared with sensible things, as the only *real* existences. Thus he says; "The Equal, the Beautiful, every thing which has a real existence,|| admits of no change whatever. . Every one of these things possessing real existence, having a single form, subsisting by itself, continues always the same." ¶

Beside Cudworth, other modern expositors of Plato have contended that his Ideas are ideas in the modern sense of the term, existing in the mind of God and in the human mind. But such language as has been quoted from him, seems wholly irreconcilable with this supposition. Ideas which he represents as constituting the ideal world, the counterpart of the sensible, as living and divine beings, as subsisting by themselves, as real existences, he could not have conceived of as ideas either of the Divine or of the human mind in the now common sense of the word "idea." It is imputing something more than obscurity and mysticism to a writer, to suppose that he commonly states a characteristic doctrine of his philosophy in words that are inconsistent with his real meaning.

It may indeed be doubted, whether any passage can be produced

* *Phædo*, pp. 91, 92.

† Ἔστι τι πῦρ αὐτὸ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ.

‡ Αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά.

§ *Timæus*, pp. 51, 52.

|| Αὐτὸ ἕκαστον, ὃ ἐστι τὸ ὄν. Plato just before speaks of αὐτῇ ἡ οὐσία ἥς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι,—“that form of being which we define as *what exists*.”

¶ *Phædo*, p. 78.

from the writings of Plato, in which he uses the word ἰδέα, *Idea*, properly *Image*, or its equivalent εἶδος, *Form*, to denote what is expressed by our word "idea," namely, a subject of thought considered merely as existing in the mind. Those words he uses to denote an external object of thought; and though the transition is easy from the latter meaning to the former, yet it was not, to say the least, familiar to Plato. We use the term "idea" to denote a subject of thought of whatever kind, general or particular. The primary sense ascribed to it by Plato in relation to his theory of Ideas was altogether different. By his Ideas or Images, he means the types of the respective classes of beings and qualities.* The only question is, whether he considered these as simply ideal types (in our sense of the word "ideal"), existing primarily in the mind of God, and to be discerned by the human intellect; or whether he considered them as proper beings, subsisting by themselves, as he has so often described them.

Plato treats of his doctrine of Ideas in the latter part of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh book of his Republic. He introduces an allegory, in which he represents men as so confined in a cavern as to be able to see only a succession of shadows passing over the side of it opposite to them. These shadows he supposes to be produced by a train of real objects moving along the top of a wall behind those who are thus confined. The shadows, according to him, correspond to the fleeting semblances of eternal Ideas, which alone can be discerned in the sensible world. The real objects are the eternal Ideas themselves. The light which casts those shadows is the Sun.† The Sun is "the offspring of The Good," that is, of the universal Idea of Good.‡ "It resembles the being which produced it. In the intelligible region The Good bears the same relation to intellect and the objects of intellect, which the Sun bears to sight and the objects of sight in the visible world." In one of those passages which undoubtedly prepared the way for Gnosticism, Plato goes on to teach that over the two classes of beings, the intelligible and the visible, there are two rulers, the Idea

* In the old logical nomenclature the term "being" is applied to qualities as well as to substances; but it is more convenient, and more conformable to the popular use of language, to confine its application to the latter.

† De Republicâ, Lib. vii. p. 514, seqq.

‡ In this discussion Plato uses indiscriminately τὸ ἄγαθόν, "The Good," and ἡ ἰδέα τοῦ Ἀγαθοῦ, "the Idea of Good," as synonymous.

of Good over the intelligible, and the Sun over the visible.* The Idea of Good he thus identifies with the Deity. He says; "Among things knowable the Idea of Good is the last, and hardly to be discerned;† but, when discerned, it evidently appears to be the cause of all things right and beautiful in the universe: in the visible world producing light and the lord of light [the Sun], and being itself the ruler in the intelligible world, the source of truth and intellect."‡

There is another passage of Plato which throws a strong light on his doctrine of Ideas. It is in the tenth book of his Republic.§ He is treating of the imitative arts, which it is here his purpose to degrade by representing them as giving only copies of copies of what really exists. He illustrates his meaning by the homely example of the picture of a bed, or a couch for reclining on at table.|| "There are three beds," he says; "one existing in nature, which, I think, we may assert to be the work of God; one produced by the human workman; and one that of the painter." God, he teaches, has formed but one bed alone, that which really exists,¶ the archetypal Idea of a bed. The human workman does not make the Idea, which is the real bed, but something like that which really exists,** and of his work the painter only gives a copy.††

* De Republicâ, Lib. vi. pp. 508, 509.

† See before, p. 182.

‡ De Republicâ, Lib. vii. p. 517.

§ Pagg. 596, 597.

|| Κλίνη.

¶ 'Ο Θεός, βουλόμενος εἶναι ὄντως κλίνης ποιητῆς ὄντως οὐσης.

** 'Ο κλινοποιὸς οὐ τὸ εἶδος ποιεῖ δὲ δὴ φάμεν εἶναι δὲ ἔστι κλίνη, ἀλλὰ κλίνην τινα.
... Οὐκ ἂν τὸ ὄν ποιοῖ, ἀλλὰ τι τοιοῦτον οἶον τὸ ὄν, ὄν δὲ οὐ.

†† We must understand Plato as meaning by his Ideas either Images subsisting by themselves, a representation, to which his own language, and that of his opponents and of his followers, fully correspond; or we must understand him as meaning by them nothing more than abstract, general ideas, in the now common sense of that term. But putting out of view what I conceive to be the impossibility of reconciling the latter supposition with the language of Plato, the question remains to be answered, What was it which constituted his doctrine of Ideas a distinguishing characteristic of his philosophy, if he meant by his Ideas nothing more than general ideas in the common sense of those words. That doctrine was called by the Platonist Atticus (in the second century) "the chief and fundamental doctrine of his peculiar philosophy;"—Τὸ δὲ κεφάλαιον καὶ τὸ κύριον τῆς Πλάτωνος αἰρέσεως, ἥ περὶ τῶν νοητῶν διδασκαλία. (Apud Eusebii Præparat. Evang. Lib. xv. § 13. p. 815.) Seneca (Epist. 58) calls it "the proper house-

To the notion of Plato, that Ideas constitute the essences of sensible things I shall advert hereafter. In reference to what we have gone over, it may be observed, that Plato does not represent his Ideas, or archetypal Images, as existing in the mind of God, but as subsisting by themselves. The Idea of Good, as we have seen, he converts into the Supreme Divinity. In analogy with this, we might suppose that he *hypostatized* his other Ideas, and thus made an indefinite number of inferior *conscious* gods. But I do not presume that any such consistency is to be looked for in his speculations. Nor, though he speaks of his Ideas as living beings and gods, do I think that he has made it manifest, that he regarded them, *generally*, as proper persons; for, in calling them "gods" he may have meant only to ascribe to them divine power. The transition from the conception of them as beings animate and divine to the conception of them as beings endued with consciousness and will, is but a step; but it is a step that involves a new plunge into mysticism, which it is not certain that Plato made. It was made, however, by his followers in later times. Philo confounded the Ideas of Plato with the hypostatized powers of God, and represents the whole

hold furniture" (*propria suppellex*) of Plato. Similar language has been continued to our own day. By Stallbaum it is said to be *velut arx atque caput totius ejus disciplinæ*, "the citadel, as it were, and head of his whole doctrine." But all philosophy is conversant about general ideas. Without them there can be no philosophy. In recognising their existence, therefore, there could be nothing peculiar in the philosophy of Plato. These are statements so obvious, that, at first view, it may seem idle thus formally to announce them.

It may, however, be said, that the peculiarity in Plato's philosophy consisted in his maintaining, that general ideas are not to be acquired in this world of the senses; but that the soul brings them with her from a preëxistent state; and that all true knowledge consists in recollecting these ideas as the soul has formerly possessed them. This doctrine may be regarded as peculiar; but it cannot serve for the basis of a system of philosophy. The fact announced by it cannot be applied to the decision of any question that admits of doubt. If there be a controversy respecting the true nature of any general idea; if individuals differ, for instance, concerning the nature of virtue, or what constitutes an action virtuous, each may appeal with equal confidence to the accuracy of his own recollections; and there can be nothing to decide between them. If all true knowledge consist in the recollection of what was known to the soul in a preëxistent state, it would seem that only two important conclusions can be drawn from this fact,—one, which Plato does infer, that the soul has preëxisted, and the other, that all exercise of reason is useless in the acquisition of knowledge.

archetypal world as the hypostatized Logos.* The theosophic Gnostics, in like manner, appear to have regarded them as being at once ideas belonging to the mind of God and proper persons. Throughout the writings of the later Platonists, these Ideas appear as living beings, gods, and persons, but at the same time as existing in the second hypostasis of their Trinity.†

Plato's doctrine concerning Ideas had a wide influence on opinion in ancient times. Nor has its influence ceased in our own. The obvious remark, that it rests, and can rest, on no proof, may seem strange and out of place. It is bringing it into collision with modes of thinking with which it has nothing to do. It is a remark of much the same kind, as if one were to say, that there is no historical authority for the stories of Ariosto. But, putting this want of evidence out of view, if we attempt to reduce the doctrine of Plato to an intelligible form, we find ourselves encountered on every side by absurdities and inconsistencies.

The Ideas of Plato are *images*. Now there are many objects of which we may *imagine* an archetypal model. We may imagine, for instance, a generic, standard, Idea of man, to which living men more or less approximate. But, even in regard to this simplest mode of apprehending what was in the mind of Plato, we cannot imagine an archetypal model of man, abstracted from the peculiarities of any particular age. In attempting to proceed in the application of his doctrine to qualities, we are immediately arrested. He often speaks of the Idea of the Beautiful,—of The Beautiful in the abstract. But we cannot conceive of an abstract *image* of the Beautiful, conformed to no particular beauty, but equally to the beauty of moral actions, of man, of the inferior animals, and of inanimate nature. We may personify Virtue poetically, as an object of the imagination; but, as an object of the understanding, we can make no image of the abstract idea of virtue. All images conceived by the mind have a form; but we can give no form to Plato's abstract Idea of Unity.

The Ideas or Images of Plato exist, according to him, by themselves, out of any mind. What we can properly conceive of only as the accidents of mind are thus represented by him as existing separately from mind. The absurdity will not be lessened, should we suppose, that he

* "See Statement of Reasons," pp. 261-266.

† See Cudworth's Intellectual System, Ch. 4. § 36.

did not regard them as existing separately from mind ; but that, in common with his followers who lived centuries after his death, he converted the ideas in the mind of God into substances, living beings, and gods.

Again, Plato represents his Ideas as existing apart from any thing else, always the same, admitting no change, neither receiving any thing foreign into themselves, nor passing into any thing without themselves ;* and yet these same Ideas he also represents as in some way acting on matter and constituting the essences of sensible things. In what manner he imagined this might be, he does not explain. He puts the following words into the mouth of Socrates ; “ I suppose, that there is something beautiful by itself, and something good, and something great, and so with regard to all other things.” “ It appears to me, that whatever is beautiful beside The Beautiful itself, becomes so only by partaking of The Beautiful. . . . Should any one tell me that a thing is beautiful either on account of its fine color, or its form, or any thing of like sort, I dismiss all these reasons, for they only perplex me, and simply, directly, and perhaps foolishly, hold to this, that there is no other cause why it is beautiful except the presence of The Beautiful, or its being associated with it.† Of the mode, I as yet affirm nothing, but only that all beautiful things become beautiful by means of The Beautiful.” ‡ This doctrine Socrates is represented as illustrating, till all his hearers agree, “ that each of the several Ideas exists, and that other things bear their names through participation of them.” § This is in the Phædo. The same doctrine is insisted upon in the Timæus ; where, in speaking of primitive matter, it is taught, that “ the resemblances of those things which eternally exist, impressed by them in a wonderful manner, hard to be explained, enter into and depart from primitive matter,” constituting its sensible forms ; and, that thus, “ in a way very difficult to be understood, primitive matter partakes of the intelligible.” ||

To this account of Plato's theory respecting Ideas as constituting

* See before, p. 517.

† Τοῦ καλοῦ εἴτε παρουσία, εἴτε κοινωνία, εἴτε ὅπη δὴ καὶ ὅπως προσγενομένη. As the text of the last clause is apparently corrupt, I have not attempted to translate it.

‡ Phædo, p. 100.

§ Ibid. p. 102.

|| Timæus, pp. 50, 51.

sensible qualities, it would seem as if nothing could be added to illustrate the character of his speculations under the aspect in which we are now regarding them. But the concluding argument for the immortality of the soul in his Phædo rests on a discussion concerning the changes of sensible qualities in material things. According to what is there maintained, when a quality is changed into its opposite, as heat, for example, into cold, the Idea constituting in the sensible object the quality changed, not admitting the Idea of its opposite, either flies off or perishes.* This conception is plainly expressed by Plato, is dwelt upon and illustrated, and is essential to his reasoning. But with this conception is to be compared his descriptions, before quoted, of eternal, unchangeable Ideas passing into nothing without themselves.

But it may be said, that we are not to understand the words of Plato in their obvious sense. It may be contended, that, in affirming that ideas in some inexplicable manner constitute the essences of sensible things, he meant nothing more than that God having these ideas in his mind impressed them upon matter,—the idea of beauty, for instance, on all things beautiful. It is not necessary to discuss the question, whether this supposition can be reconciled with his language. Were the supposition true, it would follow, that what has been regarded as a characteristic doctrine of his philosophy, consists in the enunciation, in very unsuitable language, of the proposition, that sensible things are beautiful because God made them beautiful; and in teaching that no further explanation is to be given of the matter. At the same time, according to this mode of understanding him, his machinery of ideas becomes useless. Nor will a more important doctrine be ascribed to him, if it be maintained that his meaning was, that particular things are beautiful, because they partake of *the abstract idea of beauty*,—the last words being understood in their common signification. On the contrary, we shall only have introduced a new absurdity by representing sensible things as partaking of an abstract idea. Or should it be said that this expression, “partaking of an idea,” is not to be understood in a literal sense but in a looser signification, it would seem that the meaning can be only, that beautiful things are beautiful because they partake of beauty.

We may not agree with the doctrine of Berkeley, that there are,

* Phædo, pp. 102-106.

properly speaking, no abstract general ideas, and that what have been regarded as such are only particular ideas, taken as representatives of the whole class to which they belong. This doctrine seems to have resulted from confounding an idea with an image existing in the mind. But if we mean by an idea merely a subject of thought, there can be no question about the existence of abstract ideas. We may reason, and consequently think, about virtue, or the quality which constitutes actions morally good, without having in mind the particular idea of any virtuous man, I do not say of any virtuous action, or of any single virtue, because these are themselves abstract ideas. We may discuss Berkeley's own doctrine, that there is no ground for distinguishing between color and extension by denoting the former a secondary and the latter a primary property of matter, without having in our minds the idea of any particular color, or any particular form of extension, or any particular mass of matter,—not to advert to any other of the general ideas involved in that statement. But it will not be maintained, that, in discussing the doctrine, neither color, nor extension, nor matter, is a subject of thought. We cannot, however, hesitate to agree with Berkeley, so far as to admit the fact, that there can be no image of an abstract idea; and this fact shows, that, wide as has been the influence of Plato's doctrine of Ideas, it is impossible to form a coherent imagination of it.*

* There are two ways in which such a theory as that of Plato may be considered. It may be surveyed, as it were, from a distance, and regarded in its various relations, under the broad light of reason; or one may confine his views to those of the writer, enter into the sphere of his conceptions, and meet him on his own ground. It is in the latter mode that the theory of Plato is considered in the Dialogue called "Parmenides," from the name of the principal speaker,—a dialogue which, since about five centuries after the death of Plato, has been commonly ascribed to that philosopher himself; but which I believe to have been written by one of his contemporaries in confutation and ridicule of his doctrine of Ideas. It is, I conceive, a persevering and destructive assault upon that doctrine, though after a fashion of reasoning altogether remote from that of the present day. The course of argument pursued in it is very narrow, so that no general truth is illustrated. It is unnecessarily diffuse, and there is much mere verbal subtilty and sophistry. But an ironical tone runs through it; and the question may often arise, whether the author be not sporting with his subject, without any other purpose than to perplex and confound an opponent. With some imitations of Plato's style, which one may suspect to be intended to burlesque it, the *Parmenides* is very unlike a dialogue of Plato. It has no ornaments and no digressions. The business in hand is kept steadily in view. The writer

The Ideas of Plato belonged to the class of *intelligible* beings; and to the same class, conformably to his use of language, belonged all those

does not conduct us through indirect approaches to his subject, and then, after affording a glimpse of it, turn off in another direction.

The point against which the author first directs his attack is the doctrine of Plato, that Ideas constitute in some way the essences of things. The discussion of this doctrine is represented as having been carried on between Parmenides and Socrates. The object of the writer is to show, that the theory is untenable, whatever form it may assume, or in whatever way it may be explained. One hypothesis is stated after another, and Socrates is driven to abandon them all (pp. 130-133). Parmenides then, by a dexterous management of words, is represented as bringing him fully to admit, that, supposing Ideas to exist apart from sensible things, we can have no knowledge of them whatever; or, as it is expressed by the writer, that only a wonderfully able person can learn or teach any thing concerning them (pp. 133-135).

Socrates is described as being, at the time of this discussion, a young man. It may be conjectured, that it was the purpose of the writer of the Parmenides to imply, that the doctrine of Ideas, which Plato ascribes to Socrates, in his Phædo, could have been held by Socrates only when his mind was yet unformed and his judgment immature. Parmenides, at the conclusion of this portion of the Dialogue, is represented as complimenting Socrates on his natural capacity, and on his zeal for discussion, but as admonishing him for undertaking to determine too much before he had acquired the requisite dialectical skill,—that skill, says Parmenides, which to many seems useless and trifling (pp. 135). If I have rightly conceived the character of the Dialogue, this tone of superiority and admonition was meant for Plato himself; and the praise of dialectical skill, in which the sophists regarded themselves as excelling, was intended as a retort for the attacks upon them by him, and by his master Socrates.

Such is the commencement of the discussion. But Parmenides is represented as being persuaded to continue it, not with Socrates, who is silenced, but with another young man whom he questions. The two problems now proposed are, What will follow upon the supposition of the existence of Ideas (Platonic Ideas)? and What will follow upon the supposition of their non-existence? In regard to the first question, the manner in which they are considered may be thus explained.

These abstract Ideas, subsistent by themselves, must be *simply* the abstract Ideas of classes of beings and qualities. They are such Ideas and nothing more. Nothing else is predicable of them. The abstract Idea of Beauty is nothing but the abstract Idea of Beauty. The writer illustrates the absurdities which are inherent in such an hypothesis by taking the Idea of Unity (Τὸ ἓν, *The One*). Of this, nothing can be affirmed but that it is the Idea of Unity. By affirming any thing else concerning it, another Idea is connected with it. It ceases to be simply the Idea of Unity. But if nothing else can be predicated of it, every thing else may be denied concerning it. The conclusion that follows would be

beings which we regard as not objects of the senses,—as spiritual beings. The latter were blended with those subsistent, living abstrac-

arrived at by a modern reasoner in a few words ; but Parmenides takes his way to it through a series of questions, somewhat amusing from their subtilty. The conclusion is, that existence cannot be predicated of the Idea of Unity. Consequently (on the theory of Ideas), there can be no such thing as unity. “ But is it possible,” asks Parmenides, “ that such can be the fact respecting Unity ? ” “ Not, as it seems to me,” answers the young man whom he has been questioning (pp. 137-142).

Parmenides then starts afresh, on the supposition that the Idea of Unity *exists*. But if Unity exist, another Idea, that of Existence, is inseparably connected with it. It remains no longer a simple, but becomes a twofold Idea. It consists of the Idea of Unity and the Idea of Existence. By the latter it is also constituted a proper being.

Of the Idea of Unity simply considered, nothing could be predicated. But of the Idea of Unity considered as connected with the Idea of Existence, many things may be predicated ; and it is the purpose of the writer, which he pursues, at much length, to show, that many things may be predicated of it, which are inconsistent with the Idea of Unity, and contradictory to each other. Thus he arrives at last at the conclusion, that Unity, The One, is all things, and that there is no such thing as Unity.

The supposition, that the Platonic Idea of Unity *exists*, is thus reduced to an absurdity, or rather, in the course of the discussion, to a succession of absurdities (pp. 142-160).

From this portion of the work we pass to the concluding part (pp. 160-166), which treats of “ what will follow, if the Idea of Unity does not exist.” The purpose of the writer, so far as it regards his argument, may be thus explained. It having been proved, that the Platonic Idea of Unity does not exist, it follows, *on the theory of Ideas*, that there is no unity in nature, or, in other words, that there is no being of which we may affirm that it is one being and not many. The writer proceeds to unfold the absurdities involved in this consequence.

But it may be doubted, whether he did not regard his main business as finished, and whether he had much other purpose in this conclusion, than to make a display of his adroitness in playing tricks with words. But his attempts at deception are sometimes too easily seen through. He begins with a sophism (pp. 160, 161), on which he dwells at some length, but the amount of which is, that, in denying that the Idea of Unity exists, if we use words with any meaning, we must have in our minds the very idea of unity, of which we deny the existence. But he does not advert to the fact, that this idea of unity in our own minds is not the Platonic self-subsistent Idea of Unity.

He next (p. 162) proceeds to a still bolder sophism. The hypothesis is, that “ Unity does not exist.” But nothing could be made of this proposition, which would serve his purpose. He therefore throws it into another form,—“ Unity IS non-existent.” Here existence is predicated of Unity in the very act of denying

tions, of which we cannot even form a conception. As we have seen, God himself is represented by him as an Idea, the abstract Idea

its existence; for in doing so we say "It IS." "In order to be non-existent," he reasons, "it must partake of existence." Afterwards (p. 165) we find an argument which is founded merely on a verbal quibble,—a pun. It is of course untranslatable, but it may be explained. It is a play on the words *μηδέν* and *οὐδέν*, both which, according to their etymology, mean "not one," "no one thing;" but are both commonly used in the sense of "nothing." The writer contends, that, if Unity does not exist, other things cannot exist. They can be neither *one* nor *many*. "There is *no one thing*, *μηδέν*, among them, and therefore they all are *nothing*, *οὐδέν*, and cannot be many."—Yet such writing as this has been considered as a grave exposition of the profoundest wisdom of Plato.

If we fix in our minds that representation of Plato's doctrine of Ideas which has been given above, and take the view of the *Parmenides* which has been now presented, I think we shall not find it, as it has been regarded, a work of very extraordinary obscurity. On the contrary, we shall be furnished with a key by which we can make our way throughout. The locks are not of a modern fashion, and the bolts are rusty with age, so that it may require some skill and effort to shoot them back; but we shall find, I believe, no essential obstacle in our way. The main difficulty in understanding the work will consist in the difficulty of keeping our attention steadily fixed upon modes of conception to which we are wholly unaccustomed.

If I may use the figure of a key in a different sense, the *Parmenides* may be compared to a writing in cipher. On the supposition of its being the work of Plato, I have met with no plausible, nor even intelligible, explanation of its purpose and meaning. But if, taking the representations that have been given of the doctrine of Plato and of the design of the *Parmenides*, we perceive a distinct purpose and connected meaning in the work, there can be no doubt that the key of the cipher has been found, and that those representations are essentially true.

It may seem, that in three, at least, of the Dialogues of Plato there are evidences of the vexation which this attack occasioned him. In the *Philebus* (pp. 15, 16), he turns aside, as far as I can perceive, from the proper business of the Dialogue to treat of The One and The Many, and to describe a young man, who, having got some notion of The One and The Many, thinks he has found a treasure of wisdom, is transported by the discovery, and ready for any discussion; now rolling things into one, and now unfolding them; confounding himself and others; and sparing no listener who comes in his way, neither young nor old, nor father nor mother, nor even a barbarian, if he can get an interpreter. Such language looks very much as if it were directed against some particular individual, and is such as, on the supposition which has been maintained, Plato might have used in expressing his spleen against the author of the *Parmenides*. Throughout the *Theætetus*, and the *Sophist*, which is a continuation of the *Theætetus*, Plato appears to me to have had the *Parmenides* in view. There are, I think, in these

of Goodness. I do not think that he represents the soul as an Idea, but he expressly refers it to the same general class of beings with

Dialogues, various evident references to it; and they seem to me, particularly the Sophist, as intended for an answer to it. Gray (Matthias's Ed. of his Works, ii. 412) says of the Sophist; "That part of this dialogue which is intended to explain the nature of existence and non-existence is to me obscure beyond all comprehension." Some light, perhaps, is thrown upon it by considering it as having reference to what is said in the Parmenides concerning the Idea of Unity, considered as existing or as non-existing. The long attack on the character of a sophist, which forms the main thread of this Dialogue, I imagine to have been directed against the author of the Parmenides. He, I presume, was regarded by Plato as one of the number of those whom he describes, particularly in the conclusion of the work (p. 268), "as by their brief questions compelling a fellow-dialogist to contradict himself."

But the Parmenides, having been thought to be a work of Plato, has been regarded as a book of the most recondite wisdom. "If," says Bishop Horsley, in his controversy with Dr. Priestley, "If you imagine that the absolute Unity of the divine substance is more easily to be explained than the Trinity, let me entreat you, Sir, to read the Parmenides. It is indeed in Plato's school, if anywhere, that a man's eyes are likely to be opened to his own ignorance." I have read the Parmenides," says Dr. Priestley in reply, "and I have no scruple to declare, that I was not able to get one ray of good sense from the whole of it."

Assuming the view which I have taken of the Parmenides to be correct, we may go on to observe, that the great mistake of supposing a work, written in confutation and ridicule of Plato's philosophy, to be a most profound exhibition of it by Plato himself, has afforded an opportunity for rioting in mysticism, such as has been rarely enjoyed. The Parmenides has been regarded with religious reverence, and subjected to very extraordinary interpretations. Proclus begins his commentary upon it with a prayer to all the Platonic gods, that he may be enabled to understand this inspired work, and be initiated into its most high mysteries. It was explained by him as containing the whole sum of theology. Ficinus, the most eminent Platonist of modern times, followed in the steps of Proclus. Like him, he transformed the Idea of Unity into the Divinity, and regarded the work as an account of the derivation of other beings from the Supreme. "Let him," he says, "who would come to its sacred reading, first prepare himself by sobriety of soul and freedom of mind, before daring to approach the mysteries of this celestial work." And, to descend to the less exalted language of our own times, the last commentator on the Parmenides with whom I am acquainted (Stallbaum), whose exposition is as intelligible as the Parmenides itself when considered as the production of Plato, calls it "a most subtile and weighty discussion," "a truly great and magnificent monument of ancient philosophy," "a divine work."

The opinion which I have expressed of the Parmenides occurred to me many years ago, upon first reading that Dialogue, and has only been confirmed by subsequent examination. If this view of it be correct, Socher deserves the praise of

Ideas.* The intelligible world thus became a land of shadows and chimeras, in which the real beings that appear are confounded with a crowd of dim and shapeless phantoms.

Such was the division made by Plato and his followers of beings into *intelligible* and *sensible*. We have next to consider, what was the distinction made by the ancients between *spiritual* and *material* things. This distinction had a general resemblance to that just explained, but was far from being coincident with the distinction which in modern times we denote by the use of those terms.

It was a common doctrine, as we have seen, that evil is inherent in matter, and that, in matter, existing evils, physical and moral, have their source. But, however widely different were the properties which the ancients ascribed to things material and things spiritual, their notions of them ran together, and were so blended, that it is impossible to separate them, and fix the limits of each division. There was a general absence of clear and definite conceptions of the existence of any thing either not material, according to our use of language, or not inseparably united with matter. The distinction made between the material and the spiritual was generally only a distinction between gross, inert, and earthy matter, and matter, rare, ethereal, and sometimes luminous. It may be illustrated by the conception entertained, perhaps

having first presented it to the world in his work "Ueber Platon's Schriften" (On Plato's Writings). But it appears to have found no favor among his countrymen.

Any explanation of Plato's doctrine of Ideas must be imperfect and unsatisfactory, unless accompanied by some account of the *Parmenides*, which, however little understood, or however differently interpreted, has been regarded as his great work on the subject, a storehouse of wisdom all but incomprehensible. The limits within which it has been proper for me to confine myself have precluded the possibility of entering into detail; but, perhaps, the suggestions that have been made, are sufficient to guide an intelligent reader in forming his own opinion concerning this Dialogue. If it be a work such as I have supposed, there is nothing more curious, or more instructive, in the history of literature, than the mistake committed concerning it, and the manner in which it has consequently been estimated. There is nothing which more strongly illustrates those tendencies of the mind, which we class together under the name of mysticism,—the propensity to admire the unintelligible, and to glory in absurdities, as in truths surpassing vulgar comprehension.

* *Phædo*, pp. 79, 80.

correctly, by most Christians at the present day, of the spiritual world, which, I suppose, is not that of a world of pure disembodied spirits alone, but includes the idea of bodies of ethereal mould, having a resemblance to those on earth. As denoting such bodies, the word *spiritual* is used by St. Paul, when he says ; “ An animal body is sown, a spiritual body is raised ; there is an animal body, and there is a spiritual body ;” *—expressions, which though they may seem strange to us, and highly metaphorical, presented to a contemporary reader only a common use of language. By a “ spiritual body,” such a reader would understand (to use the words of Chrysostom) “ a body lighter and more subtile, and such as might be borne on the air.” † The Greek word, πνεῦμα, which we translate *spirit*, denoted in its primary meaning *breath*, or *air in motion*, and this material sense clung to it for a long time in its derivative meanings. A very striking example of the difference between that word and our word *spirit*, is afforded by Origen, who, in arguing that God is incorporeal, undertakes to *answer* those “ who think that God has a body, because it is said that God is a spirit, πνεῦμα.” ‡ Origen himself says, that the passage, if taken literally, would convey this meaning. §

Origen believed God to be incorporeal, apparently in the proper sense of the term.|| Tertullian, on the contrary, conceived of God as having a body, but an “ *immaterial* ” body ; for Tertullian was one of the first who maintained, that matter did not exist from eternity, but was created by God. The terms “ body,” “ corporeal,” and “ incorporeal,” were used by the ancients as vaguely as the word “ spiritual.” “ Who will deny,” asks Tertullian, “ that God is a body, although God is a spirit ? For a spirit is a body of its own nature, in its own form.” ¶ He says in another place ; “ That which constitutes any thing a being is its body. Whatever exists is a body of its own nature ; nothing which has a being is incorporeal.” ** In his treatise “ Concerning the Soul,” he contends that it was not formed out of matter, but breathed

* 1 Corinthians, xv. 44.

† Homil. xli. in i. Ep. ad Corinth. col. 465. Ed. 1697.

‡ De Principiis, Lib. i. c. 1. § 2. Opp. i. 50.

§ Comment. in Joan. iv. 24. Opp. iv. 230.

|| De Principiis, Lib. i. c. 1. Opp. i. 49, seqq. Vid. etiam Huetii Origeniana, Lib. ii. Quæst. 1. § 6.

¶ Adversus Praxeam, c. 7. p. 504.

** De Carne Christi, c. 11. p. 317.

into man by God, and at the same time affirms it to be corporeal, and to have a visible form.

In conceiving of God, and the soul, as corporeal, Tertullian had in his own age abundant authorities on his side. The greatest genius and the clearest thinker among the ancient philosophers, Cicero, says that the doctrine of Xenocrates, that the soul is incorporeal mind, is scarcely comprehensible.* The God of the Stoics was an ethereal fire penetrating and moving the universe. The representation of God as pure light was familiar to the Christian fathers; and though none could make a wider distinction between the spiritual and the material world than the Gnostics and the Manichæans, yet the same conception of God was entertained by them.† It is expressed by the Valentinian, Ptolemy;‡ and in the *Doctrina Orientalis* it is taught, that no spiritual beings, neither archangels, nor the first manifestation of the Deity, who is identical with God, are incorporeal or without their peculiar forms; he, the Son, the First-born, being light inaccessible.§ Such were the opinions of those heretics. Turning again to the catholic Christians, we may observe, that, when the council of Nice decided that the Son "was God of God, light of light," they did not intend that the last words should be taken in a metaphorical sense. Their meaning was, that the substance of the Son, being light, was derived from and co-essential with that light which was the substance of the Father.|| A

* *Academic. Quæst. Lib. iv. § 39.*

† In regard to the Manichæans, see Beausobre, i. 466, seqq.

‡ *Epist. ad Floram.*

§ *Doctrina Orientalis, § 10. Conf. § 8.*

|| Milton apprehended the Deity in a similar manner, when he addressed Light, as being "of the Eternal coëternal beam," as "Bright effluence of bright essence, increate;" "since God is Light." From this notion of the Deity, "arose among the Greeks in the fourteenth century a violent controversy upon a question much more curious than useful" (I quote Beausobre), "that is to say, whether the light which shone round Jesus Christ at his transfiguration was created or uncreated light." (*Histoire du Manichéisme, i. 470.*)

In his *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, Milton proceeds much further in ascribing corporeity to the Supreme Being. "If God," he asks, "habitually assigns to himself [in Scripture] the members and form of a man, why should we be afraid of attributing to him what he attributes to himself?" B. i. Ch. ii. Such a question, proposed by one of the most enlightened minds of the seventeenth century may teach us tolerance for those eminent men who erred as grossly in ancient days.

metaphor, however, understood, would not be to the purpose of the creed, which was not to declare that the Son derived any moral or intellectual property from the Father which might be denominated *light*, but to declare him to be, properly speaking, consubstantial with the Father. The comprehension, both of the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity and of the Gnostic system of Æons, so far as either could be comprehended, was facilitated without doubt by these material conceptions of the Deity.

As regards most of those ancients, who affirmed the Deity, or the soul, to be incorporeal, it may be doubted whether they differed essentially in opinion from those who regarded them as having a body; so loose and uncertain was the meaning of the word "incorporeal," ἀσώματος. The following examples of this uncertainty are given by Cudworth, who, with his customary fairness, adduces them in opposition to his own argument. "The word *incorporeal*," he says, "may be taken for a thin and subtile body." In this sense, he observes, that according to Aristotle, "fire was by some said to be μέλιστα τῶν στοιχείων ἀσώματος and ἀσωματότατον," that is, "*the most incorporeal of all the elements*." "Aristotle himself," he adds, "uses the word in the same manner, when he affirms, that all philosophers defined the soul by three things, *Motion, Sense, and Incorporeity*," whereas "several of those there mentioned by him understood the soul to be no otherwise incorporeal, than as σῶμα λεπτόμερες, *a thin and subtile body*."* It was in this meaning of the word, that the fathers denominated the angels *incorporeal*, not regarding them as without bodies, but as having ethereal bodies, free from all grosser matter.

In the first book of his Tusculan Disputations, Cicero enumerates the opinions of the ancient philosophers concerning the soul. No one of the opinions mentioned by him can be considered as involving the belief, that the soul is a spiritual being in the modern sense of the term, capable of existing separate from matter. Nor does this appear to have been the common belief of the early Christians, either catholics or heretics. In regard to the whole question, we must recollect what has been before observed, that the conceptions of the ancients generally were not conformed to our modern distinction of beings into material and spiritual, and that they were not familiar with the senses in which we use those terms. The loose classification of beings, to

* Intellectual System, Ch. v. Sect. 3. pp. 778, 779.

which those terms in their ancient sense were applied, has only an apparent resemblance to our own.

I have already mentioned* a remarkable fact, which may serve to show the state of ancient philosophy, that neither the Greek word equivalent to "matter," *ἕλη*, nor any other single word, was used by Plato to denote matter. The word *ἕλη*, which was afterwards employed in this signification, originally denoted a *wood*, hence *wood*, and hence the relative idea of the *material* of a thing, in which sense it is used by Plato, and not as expressing the absolute idea of *matter*. Plato, however, speaks of matter without using its name; of matter, as an object of the senses, in the forms in which it presents itself in the creation, and also of primitive matter, that is, matter as it existed before the creation, coëternal with the Deity. According to one of his representations of matter as it existed in its primal state, it corresponded to the imaginary *substratum* of the logicians. He conceived of it simply as the basis on which all sensible properties afterwards supervened, being in itself without properties. In other words, it was the mere recipient of his intelligible forms; all objects of the senses being the joint product of the union of these forms, or archetypal Ideas, with primitive matter. He thus describes it as the matrix of all things sensible, as being fitted for the reception of all qualities, by being itself destitute of all; as "without form, invisible, something, he says, very difficult to be comprehended."† The later Platonists added to the description that it was *incorporeal*, a strange doctrine according to our use of the term, but easily understood in reference to the ancient sense of the word.‡ But it is to be observed that this account of primitive matter, which is given by Plato in one passage of his *Timæus*, is altogether inconsistent with the conceptions which he elsewhere expresses of matter as the cause of evil, as having a nature contrary to the will of the Deity, and as having been in a state of discordant and disorderly motion before it was reduced by him to its present forms.§

* See before, p. 198, note.

† *Timæus*, p. 51. See also what precedes and follows.

‡ Some striking passages to this effect from Plotinus are given by Massuet in one of his notes on Irenæus, p. 22. But, long before the time of the later Platonists, Aristotle speaks of metaphysicians, who regarded primitive matter as incorporeal. See the passage quoted from him by Cudworth, Ch. v. Sect. 2. p. 765.

§ See before, p. 197, seqq.

I will here venture to make a few remarks, which, if correct, may serve to show the extent of the ancient error concerning the evil properties of matter; and to remove other misapprehensions of its nature.*

* The doctrine to be stated above, it will be perceived, is essentially the same with that of Berkeley, but presented under a different aspect. It has been said, that it was held many centuries ago by sages of Hindostan, having been taught by Vyasa,

“The immortal Berkeley of that elder age.”

Were this so, it would be, perhaps, the most remarkable phenomenon in the history of opinions. We do not, I think, perceive any thing that approaches to so acute and powerful an exercise of intellect in Grecian philosophy.

But it may be doubted, whether the Indian doctrine was coincident with that of Berkeley, or arrived at by a similar process of reasoning. It was, perhaps, one form, the most comprehensive, of the doctrine of the emanation of beings from the Divine Substance. This doctrine, which has been elsewhere so prevalent, appears to have been fundamental in the different forms of the theology of India. It necessarily implies the materiality of the Divine Substance in our sense of the word *materiality*. There was nothing, therefore, incongruous in the supposition, that matter, as well as all finite minds, emanated from the Deity. Accordingly, matter may have been regarded as not self-subsistent; as not a substance distinct from the Deity, but as the substance of the Deity himself; and as not what it appears to be, but as “*Maya*,” or *Delusion*. There is little resemblance between this doctrine and that of Berkeley; but there is a striking coincidence between it and that of the Jewish Cabbalists, according to the accounts which have been given of the latter. (See *Basnage, Histoire des Juifs*, Liv. iv. ch. 7. Tome iv. p. 137, seqq. *Brucker, Hist. Philosophiæ*, T. ii. p. 980, seqq.)

Berkeley, in opposing popular errors, sometimes ran into contrary errors. His ardent temper led him rather to present his doctrines in opposition to what had been believed, than to show how they might be reconciled with men's previous opinions. He was not always accurate in defining his conceptions, and he is negligent in the use of language. His style has often more resemblance to that of an animated oral discussion, in which allowance is to be made for carelessness of expression and overstatement, than to the style proper for a philosophical treatise. Hence something of a paradoxical character appears throughout his writings, and propositions are to be found, in which he evidently asserts more than he intended, or, at least, more than he would defend. But he is preëminent as an original thinker. In this respect, in moral worth as a man, and in entire honesty of purpose as a writer, he was well qualified to be a follower of the great founder of metaphysical science. He wanted, indeed, what Locke possessed, that calm comprehensiveness of mind, that capacity of viewing a subject in all its relations both to absolute truth and to the opinions existing concerning it, that consequent ability to accommodate and ally what he taught to conceptions already held, and that familiar perspicuity of language, which constitute a union of the highest excellences in a philosopher; but which are apt to deceive an unreflecting reader, and to make him feel as if the thoughts were such, as, with a

Of matter we know nothing but that it is capable of producing in us sensations and perceptions. These we refer to something external as their cause, because we are conscious that they are not produced by any thing within us.

But of this external being we know nothing except through its powers,—its powers of producing in us sensations and perceptions. Now these powers cannot be supposed intrinsic in matter considered as a substance, something existing separately, essentially distinct from spirit. Every theist who considers matter as a substance, must regard its powers of affecting mind, as immediately dependent on the power and will of God. It can become perceptible by us only because it is the will of God that it should be so perceived. And the will and power of God must be in constant exercise to this end; for the effect produced, being the result of his will, must cease when it is no longer his will that it should exist. The effect, likewise, must be the sole result of his will, as this alone would necessarily produce it, and consequently excludes the supposition of any other power, any power intrinsic in matter, as a partial cause of it. Our perceptions, then, are the immediate result of the will and power of God. If his will were not exerted to produce them, a spiritual being might traverse the material universe without becoming acquainted with its existence. And, on the other hand, supposing matter not to exist as a substance, the present perceptions and sensations of all minds would notwithstanding still exist, were it the will of God that they should.

Our perceptions, then, are the result of the will and power of God in immediate action. They are produced by his power, not by any power intrinsic in matter considered as a substance. Matter is only a mode in which the Deity displays his power.

Strictly speaking, power cannot be ascribed to an unconscious substance, a being without volition. That cannot, properly, be considered as the power of any being, which is not exercised at its volition, nor is in any degree under its control. Power, therefore, the ability to cause that to be which did not before exist, is not to be ascribed to matter considered as a substance. Our perceptions, which are the result of

little effort, might have occurred to himself. But, after every deduction which we may be compelled to make from the praise of Berkeley, his name will remain one of the great names in the literature of the world, and one of those most deserving of honor

some external power, cannot be referred to matter, so considered, as their cause. They must be regarded as produced by the operation of the Divine Mind.

The attributes of matter, that is, its powers of producing in us sensations and perceptions, are all of which our senses give us evidence. Beside them, nothing can be known, or conceived, or imagined of matter. The question then is, whether these powers are to be referred to an inconceivable and unimaginable being, or to another being without us, the Deity, whom we believe to be perfectly adequate to produce all the effects which we experience. Nor, upon examination, will even this appear a question ; for, when we introduce matter as a substance, it serves in no way to solve the phenomena presented ; it can have no intrinsic power to produce them, nor can we even conceive of any instrumental agency which it may have in their production.

To the immediate agency of the Deity in all that we feel and perceive, may be objected the nature of many of our sensations and perceptions. To this, it is to be answered, that their true nature is not to be estimated by the manner in which a finite being is temporarily affected by them, nor conformably to his imperfect views and partial judgments. The doctrine, that God is the creator of all things, or the doctrine, that he is everywhere present, is liable to the same class of objections, from the false and incongruous associations with his character to which either may accidentally lead, as the doctrine of his agency in producing all sensations and perceptions.

Admitting the truth of this doctrine, all material things become to us only one vast display of the power of God, in immediate action, and inexhaustibly varied in its operations. The universe consists of finite spirits embosomed in the Infinite Spirit. Matter ceases to be the veil and becomes the manifestation of God. We are continually in his visible presence, so far as we can, in any case, speak of the visible presence of Him who is to be perceived by any finite being only through the displays of his power. In the strongest and most literal sense of the words, we are living, moving, and having our being in Him. And when with this belief is united a conviction of his unmingled goodness, no state of mind would seem more favorable to devotion, to habitual reference to Him, and consequently to the moral perfection of our nature.

NOTE F.

(See p. 259.)

ON BASILIDES AND THE BASILIDIANS.

BASILIDES, and his proper followers, seem to have constituted a small sect of theosophic Gnostics, which owed its distinction principally to its early existence, and to the talents and the writings of its founder and of his son Isidore. With their writings Clement of Alexandria was acquainted. He gives various quotations from them, and comments on the doctrines taught in them. But they do not appear to have been consulted by Irenæus, nor by any other of the ancient writers who profess to give accounts of the heretical sects. From Clement, therefore, we must gather almost all the information concerning the doctrines of the proper Basilidians, on which we can rely with any confidence. The peculiarities which they derived from their founder probably soon melted away; and the members of the sect appear to have become either pseudo-Christians, or semi-Christians, on the one side, or to have been confounded with the great body of the Valentinians, on the other.

Basilides, like the Valentinians, held the doctrine of a primitive Ogdoad, composed of the Supreme Being, and seven derivative Æons,* which he doubtless regarded, in common with the Valentinians, as the source of all other beings.† He appears to have thought as honorably as the Valentinians of the Creator and Ruler of the material Universe.‡ He held the common doctrine of the theosophic Gnostics, that certain individuals are elect through their spiritual nature.§ He held the Platonic doctrine of the preëxistence and transmigration of souls.||

* Clement. Al. Stromat. iv. § 25. p. 637.

† See before, p. 242.

‡ Stromat. ii. § 8. pp. 448, 449. Stromat. iv. § 12. p. 600.

§ Stromat. ii. § 3. p. 433. Stromat. iv. § 13. p. 603. Stromat. v. § 1. pp. 644, 645.

|| Stromat. iv. § 12. p. 600. Origen. Comment in Ep. ad Romanos, Lib. v. Opp. iv. 549.

He regarded the passions as evil spirits attached to the rational soul through some original disorder and confusion ; *—referring, probably, to that original disorder and confusion, resulting from the mingling of the spiritual with the material, which appears in the systems of the other theosophic Gnostics, as giving birth to the material universe. He believed our Lord to have had a real body, capable of suffering,† though, probably, like the Valentinians, he did not suppose it to have been a body of flesh and blood.

Enough has been formerly said,‡ to show that Basilides did not teach immorality. But it may be further remarked, that he held a doctrine of extraordinary rigor. He contended, that even sins committed before becoming a Christian were not pardoned, with the exception of involuntary sins, and sins of ignorance.§ In connection with this, he further maintained, that all suffering was the punishment of sin ; and that even martyrdom was only a more honorable punishment, either for actual sin, or, at least, for a tendency to sin which had not shown itself in action.|| Clement quotes his words to this effect ; and adds, what in itself is not improbable, though it does not appear in the quotations which he gives, that Basilides considered sins committed in a preëxistent state as causes of present suffering.

Basilides supposes that it may be urged by an objector, that such or such a person suffered without being a sinner. To this he replies, “ With permission I will say, that he had not committed sin, but was like an infant who suffers,” that is, on account of a tendency to sin, as he has before explained himself. “ But, if you urge the matter still further, I will say, that whomever you may name, he is a man, but that God is just. Now no man, as has been said, is pure from stain.” “ I will say any thing,” he has before observed, “ rather than speak evil of Providence.”¶

By that God who is just, and of whose providence he will not speak evil, it would seem that Basilides intended the Creator, or the immediate god of the material universe, whom the Gnostics generally affirmed

* Stromat. ii. § 20. pp. 487, 488.

† Stromat. iv. § 12. p. 600. Conf. Stromat. i. § 21. pp. 407, 408. Doctrina Orientalis, § 16. p. 972.

‡ See before, p. 78.

§ Stromat. iv. § 24. p. 634.

|| Stromat. iv. § 12. pp. 599, 600.

¶ Ibid.

to be *just*. Clement considers his words in the passage I have quoted as referring directly to our Lord considered as a man, and as meaning; "Whomever you may name, he is a man;" "now no man," not even Jesus, who suffered, "is pure from stain." The words certainly have that appearance. In common with other theosophists, Basilides distinguished, we may presume, between the man Jesus and the proper Saviour, who descended into him from the Pleroma, and left him at his crucifixion; and, if so, there may seem little doubt that he is here speaking of the sufferings of Jesus.

Maintaining such a doctrine, Basilides was represented, not unfairly, as detracting from the honor of the martyrs, and discouraging that bold profession of the truth which might lead to suffering. It was said also, that his principles caused men to deny their faith, and to sacrifice to the heathen gods.* They may have had this effect upon some of his followers.†

Clement describes him as "deifying the Devil, while daring to speak of the Lord as a sinful man."‡ Upon this, and upon some other evidence not more decisive, Basilides has been represented as holding the Persian doctrine, that the mixture of good and evil in the world is the result of the struggle between two antagonist principles, one good and the other evil, and as having thus been a precursor of Manichæus. But I suppose, that his doctrine was not essentially different from that held by the Gnostics generally, and by many of the heathen philosophers, including Plato. In common with them, Basilides believed in an evil principle resident in matter.

Such, I conceive, is the amount of all the authentic information that remains concerning the leading doctrines of Basilides and his proper followers. But Irenæus has a short account of him, § which appears to have formed the basis of the accounts of the subsequent historians of heresy in ancient times. Irenæus, however, neither directly nor indirectly refers to any authority for his assertions; and those assertions, considered as relating to Basilides, or to such as might properly be called Basilidians, are intrinsically improbable, and, at the same time,

* Origen. Comment. in Matth. Opp. iii. 856, 857. Conf. Irenæus, Lib. i. c. 24. § 5. pp. 101, 102.

† See before, p. 78.

‡ Stromat. iv. § 12. p. 601.

§ Lib. i. c. 24. §§ 3-7. pp. 101, 102. Conf. Lib. ii. c. 16. § 2. p. 137.

irreconcilable with the notices of Clement. Irenæus professedly gives the doctrines of Basilides; but, as I have had repeated occasion to remark, sects were designated by the name of their founder; and those doctrines, I presume, were doctrines which he supposed to be held by certain persons called Basilidians, and which, in consequence, he probably thought to have been derived from Basilides.

Irenæus, instead of the Ogdoad of Æons ascribed by Clement to Basilides, represents him as having taught that there were six primary Æons only. From the last two of these Æons, he says, that, according to Basilides, there proceeded "Powers, Princes, and Angels, whom he calls the First, and that by them the first heaven was made." From these, other beings emanated, who formed a new heaven; and others again from them, who formed a third; and so on in succession, till three hundred and sixty-five heavens were formed, each the antitype of its predecessor. "On this account the year has three hundred and sixty-five days, corresponding to the number of the heavens." "And they distribute," says Irenæus, "the local positions of those heavens in like manner as the astronomers. For, receiving their theorems, they conform them to their own doctrine." It seems impossible to determine, what correspondence, in the arrangement of three hundred and sixty-five heavens, Irenæus intended to indicate as existing between the astronomers and the Basilidians. But, perhaps, he had some meaning less strange than that which the words of his Latin Translator appear to present. Irenæus further says, that Basilides taught, that "the angels" who formed the last heaven were also the makers of this world.

Had Basilides held so extraordinary a doctrine, as that which Irenæus reports, concerning the three hundred and sixty-five heavens, it seems likely that it would have attracted the notice of Clement; but Clement does not mention it nor refer to it. On the contrary, he says that Basilides affirmed, that but a single world had been produced.* It is a doctrine that we are unable to connect with any opinions, which may have suggested it, or led the way to it. But at the same time, we cannot say with confidence, that it may not have been held by certain persons, whom, for some reason or other, Irenæus considered as followers of Basilides.

Irenæus ascribes to Basilides another very strange doctrine. He

* — *μονογενῇ τε κόσμον, ὡς φησὶν ὁ Βασιλείδης.* Stromat. v. § 11. p. 690.

says that, according to him, the first emanation of the Father, Intellect, descended from the Pleroma in order to deliver such as might believe in him from the power of the Makers of the World. He was called both Christ and Jesus. He did not suffer on the cross; but Simon the Cyrenean, who was compelled to bear his cross, was crucified in his stead. He, as an incorporeal power, took what form he would,* and upon this occasion assumed the form of Simon,—imposing, as is implied, his own form upon Simon,—and stood by, laughing at his persecutors, while Simon suffered.

The story of Irenæus, if credible of any individuals, is not credible of any Christians; and in regard to Basilides is entirely set aside by the charge of Clement against him, that he believed that Jesus, like others, suffered in consequence of his sins, or of his tendency to sin;—a charge, which, considering Clement's acquaintance with the writings of Basilides, proves that he held no such doctrine as that ascribed to him by Irenæus. What foundation for the story of Irenæus there may have been in the opinions of any pseudo-Christians or heretics, it is impossible to say; but some foundation it probably had. For, as we are informed by Sale, in one of his notes on the Koran, "it is the constant doctrine of the Mohammedans, that it was not Jesus himself who was crucified, but somebody else in his shape and resemblance. The person crucified some will have to be a spy that was sent to entrap him; others, that it was one Titian, who, by the direction of Judas, entered in at a window of the house where Jesus was, to kill him; and others, that it was Judas himself."† This doctrine is plainly expressed in the Koran. "The Jews," it is there said, "slew not Jesus, neither crucified him; but he was represented by one in his likeness."‡

One other subject relating to those whom Irenæus called Basilidians requires explanation. They gave, it is said, to "their Prince" the name of Abraxas or Abrasax. Who this "Prince" was, is not defined by Irenæus or Theodoret. § The Author of the Addition to Tertul-

* See before, p. 274, seqq. † Sale's Koran, i. 60. ‡ Ibid. pp. 112, 113.

§ Irenæus says, "Esse autem Principem illorum 'Αβραξας." As he has just before been speaking of the three hundred and sixty-five heavens of his supposed Basilidians, "illorum" appears at first view to refer to them. But Theodoret, in his account of the Basilidians, evidently copied that of Irenæus, and, in a passage unconnected with any mention of those heavens, he says; *Εἶναι δὲ τὸν Ἀρχοντα αὐτῶν φησὶν Ἀβρασάξ.* (Hæret. Fab. Lib. i. n. 4. Opp. iv. 195.) Here by αὐτῶν he must have intended the Basilidians.

lian,* and Epiphanius, † represent him as the Supreme Divinity. But their authority is of no worth. The numerical value of the Greek letters composing either name is three hundred and sixty-five, and the names are supposed to have been formed to express this value.

There are to be found in different cabinets in Europe a large number of engraved stones, evidently of Egyptian origin, and bearing figures and inscriptions relating to the mythology of Egypt.‡ A comparatively very small number have upon them the name Abrasax.§ This name being equivalent to Abraxas, they have hence all been denominated “Abraxas gems,” or “Abraxas stones;” and there has been a popular error, which is not yet wholly extinct, though it can be held by no one who has paid any proper attention to the subject, that these stones, generally, were wrought for the use of the Basilidians. This error runs through the account given of them by Montfaucon in his “*Antiquité Expliquée*.” But it is evident, from a mere inspection of the great number of figures which he has published, that they are generally of Heathen origin, and bear no trace of any relation to Christianity. This fact has been fully illustrated by Beausobre|| and Lardner.¶ As those writers, however, suppose, there may be among these stones some which were wrought for pseudo-Christians.

In regard to the use of the name Abrasax, the most probable conjecture is, that it is found on these heathen gems as a name of the Sun,** considered as ruling over the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. From the heathens it may have been borrowed by some pseudo-Christian or heretical Gnostics to denote the Creator, whom they

* De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 46. p. 219.

† Hæres. xxiv. §§ 7, 8. pp. 73, 74.

‡ Montfaucon has treated of these gems in the second volume of his “*Antiquité Expliquée*,” and given numerous engravings of them.

§ On one of the stones published by Montfaucon (Plate 49, No. 6) the name is spelt “Abrasat.” (The Author of the Addition to Tertullian, according to the text in Le Prieur’s edition, gives the name “Abraxat.”) On others (as Plate 49, No. 30, Plate 51, Nos. 35, 36) it is spelt “Abrasas.” According to either spelling, the numerical value of the letters would not amount to 365. I have not observed any one on which it is spelt “Abraxas.”

|| Histoire du Manichéisme, ii. 50, seqq.

¶ History of the Heretics, Ch. ii. Section 16, seqq. Works (4to. 1815), Vol. iv. p. 545, seqq.

** See Beausobre (ubi supra), and Montfaucon’s explanations of the figures engraved on these gems, as emblematical of the sun.

regarded as having his residence in the Sun, or as the informing genius of the Sun.* Such may have been the origin of the story respecting its use by those called Basilidians.†

NOTE G.

(See pp. 269 and 299.)

ON THE GOSPEL OF MARCION.

THE gospel of Marcion is represented by Irenæus and Tertullian as being a mutilated copy of the Gospel of Luke, from which that heretic had struck out passages which he could not reconcile with his doctrines. It was a book of much notoriety, and this representation proceeds from

* See before, pp. 181, 264, 265.—According to Porphyry, as quoted by Eusebius (*Præparat. Evang. Lib. iii. c. 4. p. 93*), the Egyptians considered the Sun as the Creator or Architect of the World. This correspondence of opinion with the Gnostics might give further occasion for transferring the enigmatical name of the Sun, Abrasax, to the Gnostic Creator.

† We have repeatedly had occasion to see what difficulty there is in ascertaining the truth concerning the Gnostics from ancient writers, and sometimes to remark the errors of modern writers concerning them. I will here give an example of the carelessness with which their history has been written in our own times.

Matter (to whose work I have before referred), in concluding his account of Basilides and the Basilidians, mentions the immoralities into which he supposes the Basilidians to have fallen in the fourth and fifth centuries, and then proceeds thus; (*Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme, Tome ii. pp. 97, 98.*)

“Such was the end of a sect of theosophists, of which Clement of Alexandria had said in express words; ‘The worship of these Gnostics consists in continual attention to the soul; in meditations on the Divinity regarded as inexhaustible love.’ [*Stromat. vii. p. 829. lin. 43. Ed. Potter.*] ‘Their science has two parts; the first relates to divine things; considers the First Cause, by which all has been made, and without which nothing exists; examines the essence of things which penetrate each other, and are connected together; questions the powers of nature, and demands to what end they conduct. The second part treats of human things, of the condition of man, of what he is by nature, of what he is not, of what he must do and suffer. Here they examine the vices and the virtues, the good,

writers who must have been fully acquainted with it. They are followed by Epiphanius, who likewise shows, by his particular remarks on the book, that he had examined it throughout, and whose testimony as to the fact in question, there is no reason to distrust. The fact is also

the evil, and the indifferent, or those things which lie between.' [Ib. p. 838. lin. 8.]

"Clement had added to these characteristics; 'Basilides says, that the Supreme Being should be honoured not on certain days, but through the whole of life, in the whole of conduct. [Ib. p. 851. lin. 17.] The Gnostic prays, because he knows that prayer may have place everywhere, and that he is always heard.' " [Ib. p. 851. lin. 34. lin. 37. p. 852. lin. 27.]

"All these passages," says Matter, "are taken from the seventh book of the Stromata."

I have referred particularly (in brackets) to the places where they are to be found. They are translated inaccurately, but this is comparatively a fact of small importance.

In the passages adduced by Matter, Clement has no reference to Basilides or the Basilidians. On the contrary, he is speaking of the true Christian Gnostic according to his own conception of him.

Matter says, that Clement quotes certain words of Basilides. The name of Basilides does not occur in any connection with those words. The passage said to be quoted from him is composed of fragments of different sentences of Clement himself.

It is difficult to imagine what may have been the origin of these errors. It is scarcely possible, that any one should undertake to write a history of the Gnostics, without being acquainted with the fact, that Clement familiarly uses the term "Gnostic" not to denote a Gnostic heretic, but an enlightened Christian. Even supposing this possible, the very connection of the passages quoted by Matter makes it evident at first sight, that they have no reference to heretical Gnostics. And if, through some hallucination, any one might suppose them to have such a reference, still no reason appears why he should suppose Basilidians to have been particularly intended. Nor is it easy to divine by what mistake certain words of Clement have been put together, and ascribed to Basilides.

Matter writes with a certain degree of vivacity and talent; and, considering that he is a pupil of the German school, with what may be regarded as remarkable clearness of method and meaning. But he has composed, not a history, but a romance founded on the history, of the Gnostics. His general views concerning them appear to have been rather suggested by his imagination, than to have been the result of any investigation of the subject. His work is full of particular errors of the same class with those which have just been pointed out; though it cannot be supposed that many of them are equally extraordinary. Matter, however, is not the only one among modern writers concerning the Gnostics, to whose authority, if an inexperienced student defer, he may find himself following a *blind guide through the blind darkness*—"Per le tenebre cieche un cieco duce."

alluded to by many other early writers; as, for example, by Origen, who in speaking of the adulteration of one of his own writings, says; "See how he has corrected our disputation; in the same way as Marcion corrected the Gospels."*

But, in the last half of the last century, there sprang up in Germany an hypothesis, which for a long time obtained wide reception among the theologians of that country, namely, that the gospel of Marcion was not a mutilated copy of that of Luke, but a work derived from the same written sources with Luke's Gospel, and antecedent to it in that progressive growth of gospels which finally resulted in the production of those of Luke, Matthew, and Mark. The theory of this gradual formation of the first three Gospels has been examined in the first volume of this work; and if it be wholly untenable, as I trust it has appeared to be, then the opinion that has been maintained respecting Marcion's gospel, since it depends on its connection with that theory for any show of plausibility, must perish with it. This, perhaps, is all that it is necessary to say concerning the subject; especially as the opinion has been confuted,† and, I believe, generally abandoned in the country of its birth. But it may be more satisfactory, and not uninteresting, to enter into some explanation; and to state the proofs of what for fifteen centuries was the unquestioned belief respecting Marcion's gospel.

The ancient testimony concerning this book is first to be attended to. Irenæus, after a brief account of Marcion's doctrines, says; "Moreover, he mutilated the Gospel according to Luke, taking away all that is recorded of the generation of the Lord, and many parts of his discourses, in which he clearly recognises the Creator of this Universe as his Father; so that Marcion thus gave to his disciples not the Gospel [not the whole history and doctrine of Christ], but a fragment of the Gospel, persuading them that he was better acquainted with the truth than the Apostles who have given us the Gospel."‡

* Epist. ad Alexandrinos. Opp. i. 6. Conf. Ex Comment. in Ezechiel. Opp. iii. 352, 353.

† Particularly by Hahn in his work entitled "Das Evangelium Marcions in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt," and by Olshausen in his "Echtheit der Evangelien erwiesen," pp. 111-215.

‡ Lib. i. c. 27. sec. 2. p. 106.

The reason assigned by Irenæus for not undertaking a particular confutation of the Marcionites in his general work against heresies has been already quoted.* It occurs in connection with the passage just given, and well deserves attention in reference to our present subject; "But because he alone has dared openly to mutilate the Scriptures, and has gone beyond all others in shamelessly disparaging the character of God [the Creator], I shall oppose him by himself, confuting him from his own writings, and, with the help of God, effect his overthrow by means of those discourses of our Lord and his Apostle [St. Paul] which are respected by him, and which he himself uses."† Tertullian and Epiphanius, in confuting Marcion, proposed, as we shall see, to pursue the same course of appealing only to his mutilated Gospel and his mutilated collection of St. Paul's Epistles; and of not quoting against him any portions of Scripture, but those the authority of which he admitted.

There are various other passages in which Irenæus affirms the fact, that Marcion's gospel was a mutilated copy of Luke's. Speaking of the Gnostics, he says; "They have turned away in their doctrines from him who is God [the Creator], and think that they have discovered more than the Apostles, having found out another God. They maintain, that the Apostles still thought with the Jews when they announced the Gospel, but that they themselves are more pure in their belief and wiser than the Apostles. Hence Marcion and his followers have been led to mutilate the Scriptures; some they reject altogether; others, as the Gospel of Luke and the Epistles of Paul, they shorten, and maintain that what they have thus abridged is alone of authority. But we, in another work, with the help of God, shall confute them from those portions which they yet preserve."‡

Tertullian, beside composing an entire Treatise in five Books against the Marcionites, refers to them often in his other writings. He uniformly represents the gospel of Marcion as a mutilated copy of that of Luke. This fact is so often brought into view by Tertullian, that it would be idle to produce at length the particular passages in which it is stated, referred to, or implied. "It is clear," he says, "that the

* See before, p. 56.

† Lib. i. c. 27. § 4. p. 106.

‡ Lib. iii. cap. 12. § 12. p. 198. Besides the passages above quoted, see Lib. iii. c. 11. § 7. p. 190. Ibid. § 9. p. 192. Lib. iii. c. 14. §§ 3, 4. p. 202.

Gospel of Luke had come down entire till the sacrilege of Marcion.* In the fourth Book of his work against Marcion, he proposes to confute him from his own gospel, making use of no passages of Scripture but such as were found in it. *Ex his revincendus es quæ recepisti*; "You are to be confuted," he says, "from what you have received."† This purpose he repeatedly avows, and accordingly he goes through Marcion's gospel in order, remarking on the passages which were to his purpose, and occasionally taking notice of its omissions. In another work (*De Carne Christi*‡) he speaks of that book, in which, in replying to Marcion, he had appealed to Marcion's own gospel.§

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. iv. c. 5. p. 416.*

† *Ibid. c. 34. p. 449.*

‡ *Cap. 7. p. 312.*

§ As I have formerly mentioned (See before, p. 300, note), Hahn has attempted the restoration of Marcion's gospel, principally from the information afforded by Tertullian and Epiphanius, and has given it in what is probably very like its original state. In other words, the Gospel of Luke has been exhibited by him with the omissions and alterations made by Marcion.

The last writer of any note who has maintained that Marcion's gospel was not a mutilated copy of the Gospel of Luke is Eichhorn. He contends (*Einleit. in das N. T. i. 71, note*), that Tertullian was not acquainted with Marcion's gospel. This supposition, as may appear from the statements I have made, implies great ignorance of what is to be found in Tertullian. In connection with this, Eichhorn maintains (*Ibid. pp. 67, 68; p. 72, note*), that Tertullian did not confidently hold the opinion, that Marcion's gospel was derived from Luke's; and that he expresses himself with uncertainty on the subject. His main argument is founded on the concluding sentence of the following passage from Tertullian. (*Advers. Marcion. Lib. iv. c. 2. p. 414.*)

"Marcion assigns no author to his gospel; as if it were a greater crime to forge a title, than to mangle the body of a work. And here I might plant my foot, and contend that a work is not to be received, which does not show its face, which affords no ground of reliance, and gives no promise of fidelity, by the fulness of its title, and the due annunciation of its author. But I prefer to meet him at every point, and will not conceal what may be perceived from our Gospels. For, of those historians whom we possess, it appears that Marcion selected Luke for his mutilations."

"*Lucam videtur* Marcion elegisse quem cæderet:" These words Eichhorn understands thus; "Marcion seems to have selected Luke for his mutilations;" and hence concludes that Tertullian expresses himself doubtfully. The word *videtur* is in itself ambiguous; but that it has not here the sense ascribed to it by Eichhorn, is evident from what precedes the sentence in which it stands, and from the discussion that follows, in which Tertullian assumes without hesitation that Marcion did found his gospel on that of Luke,—to say nothing of all that Ter-

Epiphanius, like Tertullian, undertook to confute Marcion from the passages which Marcion himself retained.* He accordingly first gives a long series of such passages as he proposed to use, intermingling it with notices of omissions and of supposed or real corruptions in Marcion's gospel, as it existed in his time; and then repeats those passages, subjoining the argument or remark which he founded upon each of them. The information which he affords is, as I have before said, of such a nature that there is no reason to distrust its essential correctness. It is evident upon examination, that he did not copy from Tertullian, but is an independent authority; and the coincidence of their accounts of Marcion's gospel proves the correctness of both writers.†

tullian has elsewhere affirmed, and of all the other evidence which determines that this fact was notorious and undisputed.

* Hæres. xlii. Opp. i. 309, seqq.

† Epiphanius introduces the passages which he means to use in confuting Marcion, by saying that he had "selected from Marcion's Gospel and his Apostolicon [that is, his collection of St. Paul's Epistles] a series of those passages by which he might be confuted,"—"passages in which he has foolishly retained the declarations of our Saviour and his Apostles against himself." "Some of them," he says, "Marcion corrupted by alterations; but there are others left unchanged by him, by which he may be confuted;" and Epiphanius proceeds to state what he expects to prove from the passages which he is about to produce (pp. 310, 311). His main purpose, and consequently the general character of the passages which he has brought together, are not only evident from the use he has made of those passages, but are explained by him over and over again in the plainest manner; so that it is impossible for one who has read what he has written, to fall into any mistake concerning them. (See, in addition to what has been referred to, p. 311, C. p. 322. pp. 349, 350. p. 371. pp. 373, 374.)

But Epiphanius, in the collection of passages he has brought together, takes notice of the omissions and changes of words made in them by Marcion, or his followers; and likewise, incidentally to his main purpose, mentions several portions of Luke's Gospel which he says Marcion had expunged. These facts, I suppose, have given occasion to an erroneous Latin title (to which there is nothing corresponding in the Greek), prefixed to the passages in Petavius's edition of his works. They are entitled "Passages of Scripture corrupted by Marcion." They should have been called "Passages retained by Marcion, from which he may be confuted."

But Eichhorn, apparently led astray by this erroneous title, and proceeding without further examination, has regarded the collection made by Epiphanius as intended for a collection of passages in which the text of Marcion varied from that of Luke, and which Epiphanius, in consequence, produced only as corrup-

What reply, then, did the Marcionites make to this clear, long-continued, unhesitating statement of their opponents, that their Gospel was tions of Luke's text by Marcion. The mistake was partially pointed out in a review of his work, to which he adverts in a note to the second edition of his first volume (pp. 65, 66). The opinion of the reviewer was "that that confused writer, Epiphanius, in giving the variations of Marcion's text, introduced among them, altogether out of place, some passages which he thought he could use for his confutation." But this fact, if true, Eichhorn contends, would not affect his conclusions.

Thus persevering in his misconception of the purpose of Epiphanius, and of the character of his citations, Eichhorn retains in his second edition the account of Marcion's gospel, and the whole accompanying body of extraordinary criticisms and remarks, which he had founded upon that error. (See pp. 43-84, pp. 650-675, and many passages in that portion of his work, which treats "Of the First Three Gospels generally.") His mistake was facilitated by the facts, that Epiphanius does mention omissions and changes in Marcion's gospel, that he does not quote with particular regard to accuracy, and that he often gives passages in an abridged form, citing a few words which he deemed sufficient to recall them to the recollection of the reader. Passages thus abbreviated, Eichhorn has considered as so standing in the text of Marcion. To illustrate by a single example, Epiphanius thus quotes Luke ix. 40, 41. "*I besought thy disciples.—They could not cast him out.—And to them, O faithless race, how long shall I be with you.*" This Eichhorn conceives to have been the reading of Marcion's gospel. Thus Epiphanius's notices of Marcion's omissions and variations, his own inaccuracies, and his abridged mode of quotation, have enabled Eichhorn to give a series of comments on many of the passages adduced, which is conformed to his fundamental mistake concerning their character, but which at the same time is full of particular oversights and errors. Still he is compelled to say (p. 55), that "Epiphanius's account of the variations in Marcion's gospel is often so defective that it is uncertain in what they consisted."

Eichhorn has thus founded his whole discussion concerning Marcion's gospel on two essential misconceptions. Tertullian and Epiphanius are the only writers who have given particular specifications of its contents. But though Tertullian, in the fourth Book of his work, "Against Marcion," professes to confute him solely from his own gospel, and goes through it for this purpose from beginning to end, commenting on a great number of passages, yet Eichhorn asserts that Tertullian had no copy of that gospel before him. He throws himself, therefore, on Epiphanius as his sole authority; and he has wholly mistaken the general purpose and character of the quotations given by Epiphanius.

It may seem as if it were scarcely worth while thus particularly to point out the errors of an individual writer. But it is to be recollected, that Eichhorn is the last able and elaborate defender of an opinion, respecting Marcion's gospel, long current in Germany, that he had the benefit of all the labors of his predecessors, and that this opinion was a main support of the theory of the gradual formation of the first three Gospels.

a mutilated copy of Luke's? From any writer of the first three centuries it does not appear that they denied the fact. With one exception, it does not appear from any writer of any age. With this exception, the charge has come down to us without an intimation that it was contradicted.

The exception to which I refer is to be found in a work which I have formerly mentioned as an inaccurate compilation to which little credit is to be given, the Dialogue *de Rectâ Fide*.* The Marcionite who is introduced in this Dialogue is represented as saying, that "there is but one Gospel, which was written by Christ;"—and, when it is objected to him in the form of a question, "Did the Lord himself write, that he was crucified, and rose again on the third day?" the brief answer assigned to him is; "The Apostle Paul added it." †

That in the fourth century, before which time this Dialogue was not written, a Marcionite might be found who maintained this absurd opinion is *possible*; though the implication of the writer of this Dialogue that such was the fact, does not go far to render it probable. But it is incredible, that Marcion himself, or his followers, during the second century, should have held such an opinion. The folly of the statement assigned to the Marcionite of the fourth century, whether with or without foundation, serves only to show that no plausible history of Marcion's gospel, different from that given by his opponents, was known to his followers at that period.

We may then affirm, that there is no evidence that Marcion or his followers, during the first three centuries, gave any account of the origin of his gospel, different from that given by their opponents. But, if the theory which has been formed for them in modern times were true, they undoubtedly would have said what has been said for them. They would have gloried in possessing a more ancient gospel, favoring their own doctrines, of which their Catholic opponents used an interpolated copy; and their opponents could not but have given abundant attention to such a claim. We should have found not a few remarks upon it in the work of Tertullian; nor is it possible that the fathers should for two centuries and a half, from Irenæus to Theodoret, have continued to repeat, that Marcion's gospel was a mutilated copy of Luke's, without ever attempting to prove the fact, or noticing that the Marcionites denied it, but apparently regarding it as notorious and un-

* See before, p. 59, seqq.

† Apud Origenis Opp. i. 808.

disputed. The fact, then, is established not merely by the evidence of their catholic opponents, but by the circumstance, that it was not denied by the earlier Marcionites themselves, and that, if those of a later period did in fact deny it, the supposition which they brought forward is not of a character to deserve a moment's consideration.

But so far were Marcion and his followers from denying the origin assigned to their gospel, that, as I have formerly explained,* they asserted principles, the express bearing of which was to justify their omission of passages in the Gospel of Luke, and their rejection of the authority of the other three Gospels. They held that the Apostles generally, when they preached the Gospel, were under the influence of their erroneous Jewish faith. On this principle, Irenæus, as before quoted,† says, "Marcion and his followers have been led to mutilate the Scriptures." But St. Paul they regarded as much more free from Jewish prejudices than the other Apostles. "Marcion," says Tertullian, "having got hold of the Epistle to the Galatians, in which St. Paul finds fault with the Apostles themselves for not walking steadily according to the truth of the Gospel, and in which also he accuses certain false apostles of corrupting the Gospel of Christ,‡ endeavours to destroy the reputation of those Gospels which are truly such, and have come forth under the names of Apostles or Apostolic men, in order that he may transfer to his own the credit which he takes from them."§ In representing the Apostles, and first teachers of Christianity, as having fallen into anti-Gnostic errors through their Jewish prejudices, the doctrine of Marcion was the same as that of other Gnostics. On this ground other Gnostics refused to assent throughout to the authority of their writings, and especially to defer to all their representations of the teaching of Christ as contained in the Gospels.|| Marcion, with the boldness which appears to have belonged to his character, proceeded a step further, and struck out the passages, the authority of which he did not admit, from the gospel which he prepared for his followers. Nor, after rejecting any appeal to the other three Gospels, was it strange, that he should thus free himself from those passages in the Gospel of Luke which he regarded as objectionable.

* See before, p. 291, seqq. † See before, p. 486. ‡ Galatians, ch. ii.

§ Advers. Marcionem, Lib. iv. c. 8. p. 414. Conf. De Præscript Hæretic. capp. 22-24. pp. 209, 210.

|| See before, pp. 291-293.

It is obvious from the preceding statements, that in the charge which the Marcionites brought against the Apostles, of holding certain Jewish errors, they clearly implied their belief, that those errors were to be found in the Gospels as originally written.

The mutilation of Luke's Gospel, which is ascribed to Marcion, so far from being a disputable or disputed fact, was, as is stated by Tertullian, continued by his followers. It was not simply a fact which had taken place; it was a process which was still going on. "They daily remodelled their gospel," says Tertullian, "as they are daily confuted by us;"*—that is, from passages which Marcion had suffered to remain. The followers of Marcion continued to practise on the principles of their master.

But still more, Marcion himself not only remodelled the Gospel of Luke, he extended the same process of mutilation to the Epistles of Paul. As respects these Epistles, equally with Luke's Gospel, Irenæus, Tertullian, and Epiphanius profess their design of confuting him from the passages he retained. Speaking of the Epistle to the Romans, Tertullian says; "What holes Marcion has made, particularly in that Epistle, by taking away at his pleasure, will appear from comparing it with our entire copy. Those passages which he did not see were to be erased,—his negligences and oversights,—will be sufficient for me;"† that is, will afford sufficient materials for a confutation of his doctrines. It is unnecessary to quote the other passages to the same purpose, and the particular specifications of the charge, which might be produced from Tertullian and Epiphanius. In regard to Marcion's gospel and Luke's, it has been pretended, as we have seen, that they were two different gospels; but, as it could not be pretended that there were originally two different sets of St. Paul's Epistles, resort has been had to an hypothesis, that the discrepancies between those of the Marcionites and those of the catholic Christians were only various readings. But this hypothesis is as little plausible when applied to the differences between these two sets of the Epistles, as it would have been if applied to the differences between the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Marcion. The latter books might with as much likelihood have been repre-

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. iv. c. 5. p. 416.* It may, perhaps, be worth remarking that a similar charge is brought against the Marcionites in the Dialogue *de rectâ Fide*, p. 867.

† *Advers. Marcion. Lib. v. c. 13. p. 477.*

sented as copies of the same work, differing from each other not through intentional changes, but only through accidental various readings. The solution which has been offered of the discrepancies between the copies of St. Paul's Epistles used by the Marcionites, and those used by the catholic Christians, necessarily implies, that his Epistles had been most negligently transcribed till toward the middle of the second century; and that at this time all the copies in which were the gross omissions resulting from this negligence happened to fall into the hands of the Marcionites; but that the catholic Christians, having in their possession the more perfect copies, ceased, at that period, to be so negligent in their transcription, and perpetuated them correctly, so that the extraordinary various readings which then existed have disappeared from the copies now extant. Yet this solution is required as a prop for the modern hypothesis respecting Marcion's gospel, to prevent it from at once falling to the ground. For no one who believes that he mutilated the Epistles of St. Paul will be persuaded that he did not mutilate the Gospel of Luke.

As I have before observed, the modern hypothesis respecting Marcion's gospel is essentially connected with the theory of the gradual formation of the first three Gospels. There was such a correspondence between Marcion's gospel and Luke's, that it admits of no dispute, that Luke's must have been an enlargement of Marcion's or Marcion's a mutilation of Luke's. But the former supposition is not only exposed to all those objections which bear against the theory of the gradual formation of the first three Gospels, but to others which are peculiar to it. The passages, so far as we are informed concerning them, found in Luke's Gospel and not in Marcion's, are such as must have been particularly obnoxious to the Marcionites. But if the author of Luke's Gospel took that afterwards used by Marcion as the substance of his own, it is scarcely credible that all or a great majority of those passages which he added should have happened to bear this character. Nor can we readily believe, that, if he had so easily furnished himself with the principal material for his book, he would have commenced it with a false statement respecting his own diligent inquiries, which must have been very liable to detection.

There appears then to be no reasonable doubt, that, according to the uniform testimony of antiquity; Marcion's gospel was a mutilated copy

of Luke's. To the inferences which follow from this fact, we have already attended.*

The contrary hypothesis is one of many, tending to shake the credit of the Gospels, which since the latter part of the last century have appeared in German theology. In this, and in some other instances, we have seen, in the course of the present work, on what foundations those hypotheses have rested. The most specious of their number, so far as they existed in his day, were embodied by Eichhorn in his writings; and no modern German theologian has excelled him in clearness of purpose and statement. So far as regards his modes of thought, reasoning, and expression, he wrote as other scholars had been accustomed to write. We have had occasion to take some notice of his oversights and negligences.

But there is much in German theology far more extraordinary than any thing to be found in the writings of Eichhorn. Even in his day, Paulus had published his "Commentary on the Gospels," the main design of which is to prove, that, though the accounts contained in them of the miracles of our Saviour were founded on facts, and are essentially true, yet those facts were natural events, having nothing of a miraculous character. This system of interpretation was for a long time current in Germany; and one might have thought, that common sense could not be further outraged. But the lowest degradation of intellect had not been reached. A writer of the present day, Strauss, has gained much notoriety by a work entitled, "The Life of Jesus," the purpose of which is to maintain, that the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels are *mythical*, as he calls them, by which he means fabulous; that nothing is certainly known of his true history, but that, having been mistaken for the Jewish Messiah, the fabulous accounts of him contained in the Gospels (which were founded principally on traditions and popular notions concerning the expected Messiah) had their origin, for the most part, among the Jewish people in the interval between his death and the destruction of Jerusalem, became connected with his name, and clouded over all the real events of his life. It is, of course, impossible, that so brief an account should give the impression produced by the work itself. It is a work, which to one unacquainted with German speculation may exhibit the human mind under a new aspect; and cause a strange feeling of wonder at the entire incapacity which it

* See before, particularly pp. 346, 347.

exhibits of taking a comprehensive and correct view of a subject, or of estimating what is probable or possible, connected with much pretension, a degree of superficial acuteness, and the power of writing two thick volumes. But this is not the most remarkable fact respecting it. Though, putting aside every other consideration, it might seem adapted to repel the great body of readers by its heaviness and wearisome diffuseness, yet the third edition of it is now lying before me ; and it has also been translated into French, to furnish a knowledge of Christianity to a people, who are in general so mournfully ignorant of it. But in Germany one folly has of late been continually thrusting out another ; and we may readily believe what Strauss affirms, that the fashion of explaining miracles as natural events, which was so long prevalent, has fallen into disrepute ; and that he undertook his work, because it appeared to him to be time to substitute a new mode of considering the Gospels, in place of the obsolete expositions of the Supernaturalists and the Naturalists.

NOTE H.

(See p. 272.)

ON THE USE OF THE WORDS *ΘΕΟΣ* AND *DEUS*.

IN rendering the words *θεός* and *deus* in this and in a former work,* I have repeatedly wished to explain my views of their signification and use ; and on the last occasion which presented itself in the present volume, I determined to make a few remarks on the subject.

In order to a right apprehension of the theology either of the ancient Heathens, or of the early Christians, the signification and use of those words must be understood. But I am not aware, that any account has been given of them which will satisfactorily solve one very common phenomenon in the writings of the ancient heathen philosophers. I refer to the fact, that throughout their writings the words are used in the plural and in the singular number indiscriminately. The solution of this fact involves the most important explanation required of their sig-

* "Statement of Reasons."

nification and use. The following passage from Cicero* is an example of what has been mentioned.

“Qui deos esse concedant, iis fatendum est, eos aliquid agere, idque præclarum. Nihil est autem præclarius mundi administratione ; deorum igitur consilio administratur. Quod si aliter est, aliquid profecto sit necesse est melius, et majore vi præditum, quàm deos, quale id cumque est, sive inanima natura, sive necessitas vi magnâ incitata, hæc pulcherrima opera efficiens, quæ videmus. Non est igitur natura deorum præpotens, neque excellens, si quidem ea subjecta est ei vel necessitati, vel naturæ, quâ cælum, maria, terræque regantur. Nihil autem est præstantius deo ; ab eo igitur necesse est mundum regi ; nulli igitur est naturæ obediens aut subjectus deus ; omnem ergo regit ipse naturam. Etenim, si concedimus intelligentes esse deos, concedimus etiam providentes.”

This passage is thus translated by Francklin.

“If we acknowledge there are gods, we must believe they are employed, and that in something excellent; nothing is so excellent as the administration of the universe ; it is therefore governed by the wisdom of the gods. Otherwise we must imagine there is some cause superior to the deity, whether it be a nature inanimate, or a necessity agitated by a mighty force, that produces those beautiful works which we behold. The nature of the gods would then be neither supreme nor excellent, if you subject it to that necessity, or to that nature, by which you would make the heaven, the earth, and the seas to be governed. But there is nothing superior to the deity ; the world therefore must be governed by him ; consequently the deity is under no obedience or subjection to any nature, but rules all nature himself. In effect, if we allow the gods have understanding, we allow also their providence.”

It is evident that this rendering must be erroneous. The sense which it gives is incongruous. There is an entire confusion of ideas in thus passing forwards and backwards from the gods to the Deity, and from the Deity to the gods ; and in ascribing to both the same characteristics. But the occurrence of passages like that quoted from Cicero is common in the ancient heathen philosophers. That we may correctly understand them, two facts are to be attended to.

The first is, that the signification of the terms *θεοι*, and *deus*, as used by heathen writers, was very different from that of our word “God.”

* De Naturâ Deorum, Lib. ii. § 30.

The latter is, in its primary meaning, a *proper name*, confined to the Supreme Being. The Greek or Latin term which we translate "god" was, on the other hand, a *common name*, equally applicable to a very large class of beings.

The second consideration is, that common names are used in the singular number, not merely to denote an individual belonging to the class which they designate, but the whole class, or individuals of that class considered in reference to qualities common to the class. In such cases the singular may be changed into the plural without any change of meaning. As for example,

"God made the country and man made the town."

That is, "men made towns" or built cities.

.

"Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?"

Is it for thee that linnets sing?

"Loves of his own and raptures swell his note (his notes)."

.

"Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn (fawns),
For him (them) as kindly spreads the flowering lawn (lawns)."

.

"In the same temple, the resounding wood,
All vocal beings hymned their equal God."

In temples of the same kind, the resounding woods.

.

"Thus beast and bird (beasts and birds) their common charge attend ;
The mothers nurse them, and the sires defend."

Here in the last line, the same sense might be expressed by the use of the nouns in the singular number ;

"The mother nurses, and the sire defends.

.

"The lion inhabits (lions inhabit) both Africa and Asia."

I give a few short examples, such as may be easily detached from their connection, merely for the sake of illustration. Instances of this use of language are of continual occurrence.

It is by this use of common names in the singular number with a plural signification, that such passages as that quoted from Cicero are to be explained. *Deus* as used by him in the singular does not mean the Deity or God. It denotes the class of beings called "gods." Where "the Deity" is used in the translation I have quoted from Francklin, we shall give the true meaning of the original by substituting "the gods." The whole passage will thus become coherent.

The most striking analogy in our own language to this use of the names *θεός* and *deus* in the ancient languages is found in the use of the name "man;" because this name, like the two former, denotes a class of intelligent beings. The word "man" is very commonly used in the singular number with a plural meaning. As, for example:

"A part how small of the teraqueous globe
Is tenanted by man!"

"Consider man as mortal, all is dark."

"Man shall be blessed as far as man permits."

The singular and plural consequently may be used interchangeably, as in the following passage.

"To faith and virtue why so backward man?
From hence:—The present strongly strikes us all;
The future faintly. Can we then be men?
If men, Lorenzo, the reverse is right,
Reason is man's peculiar, sense the brute's.
The present is the scanty realm of sense;
The future, reason's empire unconfined."

As in our language, the word "man" in the singular number is used to denote men generally, so in the Greek and Latin languages, the words *θεός* and *deus* are used in the singular, with a like plural signification, to denote the gods generally, considered as a class of intelligent beings superior to man.*

* There is a peculiarity of our language in the use of the word "man" which deserves notice. In the Greek, in the English, and in other modern languages, which have the definite article, it is a *general* rule, that the article should be prefixed to common names when used in the singular to denote a class of beings; but our word "man" when thus used always rejects it;—except some discrimi-

As this use of *θεός* and *deus* in the singular with a plural signification has not been commonly remarked, it may be worth while to illustrate it by a few more examples. In the conclusion of the first Book of Cicero's work "On the nature of the Gods," Cotta thus reasons against the doctrines of Epicurus.

"Disinterested love and friendship are qualities of men. How much more then are they qualities of the gods (*deorum*)! They, though in want of nothing, love each other, and consult for the good of men. If it be not so, why do we venerate, why do we pray to the gods (*deos*). Epicurus takes away the gods (*deos*) in reality, and leaves them in words. If the gods are truly such that they have no favor and no love for men, let them go. For why should I say, 'May the gods be propitious.' (*Si maxime talis est deus, ut nullā gratiā, nullā hominum caritate teneatur, valeat. Quid enim dicam, Propitius sit.*)"*

To one of the statements of Balbus in the same work, Cotta thus objects.

"'The gods (*dii*),' he says, 'do not take notice of all offences, any more than kings.' What resemblance is there between the two cases? For, if kings knowingly pass over crimes, it is a great fault. But the gods have not the excuse of ignorance. (*At deo ne excusatio quidem est inscientia.*) You give a notable defence of them, when you say, that such is the power of the gods (*Quem—i. e. quem deum—vos præclare defenditis, cum dicitis eam esse vim deorum*), that if any one should escape by death the punishment of a crime, yet it would be required of his children, his grandchildren, his posterity. O wonderful equity of the gods (*deorum*)!" †

Cicero says in his work "On Laws : " ‡

"The first ground of fellowship between man and the gods is reason (*Prima homini cum deo rationis societas*), which belongs both to man and the gods (*est in homine et in deo*). . But as reason is common to both, so also is right reason. And as this is a law, we are to be naming epithet be connected with it which limits its application to a particular class of men. In the latter case it falls under the general rule; as we may say, "the virtuous man," meaning "virtuous men."

* Lib. i. § 44.

† Lib. iii. §§ 37, 38.

‡ De Legibus, Lib. 1. § 7.

regarded as further associated with the gods by subjection to a law (*lege quoque consociati cum diis putandi sumus*)."

In this example, we find the words *homo* and *deus* connected together both with the same plural sense, as denoting the individuals of a class.

I had thought of adding at length some other examples, as one from the *Memorabilia* of Socrates,* where Socrates is urging on Aristodemus the worship of the gods, and maintaining their existence and providence, and where, after using the name *θεοι* throughout the preceding part of the discourse in the plural, he passes to the use of *θεος* in the singular, and speaks of *τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ὀφθαλμὸν* and *τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ φρόνησιν*, but returns immediately to the plural form; and another from the first sentences of Plutarch's treatise "Of Isis and Osiris," which have been remarked for the indiscriminate use of *θεος* in the singular and the plural. But further examples are not necessary for the illustration of the use which has been pointed out, of *θεος* and *deus* in the singular number; and are not required in proof of it, since any one whose attention is directed to the subject may find such examples in abundance.

From overlooking this use of those words, they have, when occurring in the singular number in ancient heathen writers, been often misunderstood as intended to denote the Supreme Being. "Nothing is more frequent with Pagan writers," says Cudworth, "than to speak of *God* singularly, they signifying thereby the one Supreme Deity."†—"The Pagans did not only signify the Supreme God by these proper names [*Zeus, Jupiter, &c.*], but also frequently by the appellatives themselves, when used not for a god in general, but for the God, or God *κατ' ἐξοχὴν*, and by way of eminency. And thus *ὁ θεός* and *θεός* are often taken by the Greeks, not for *θεῶν τις*, a god, or one of the gods, but for *God* or the *Supreme Deity*."‡ It appears, that Cudworth regarded *θεός*, when used in the singular number, as having no other power than to denote an individual, either a god or God; and concluded therefore, that, when it did not refer to some heathen god, it must denote the Supreme Being. But, so far as a belief in a plurality of gods exists, *θεός* must be a common name. Like other common names, therefore, it

* Lib. i. c. 4.

† Intellectual System, Ch. iv. § 27. p. 453.

‡ Ibid. § 14. p. 260.

can refer to any one particular being, only through some circumstance accompanying its use which determines its reference to that being. It is true that those heathen philosophers before Christianity, who had a conception of one Supreme Power, answering more or less to our conception of God, applied to that Power the terms *θεός* and *deus*; but not nakedly and unexplained. They did so by means of some discriminating epithet, as when Cicero says, that man was produced *a summo deo*, "by the Supreme God;" or by using the terms in such a connection as left no uncertainty about their reference, as when Plato, in his *Timæus*, gives to the Creator of All Things, who is evidently the subject of his discourse, the appellation of *ὁ θεός*; and as Aristotle, after describing the Prime Mover of the Universe, continues to speak of him under the same appellation.* There are, perhaps, other cases in which the circumstance determining the reference is less obvious; but some circumstance there must have been; for *θεός* and *deus*, being common names, could denote a particular being only when that being was in some way brought before the mind of the reader.

But a grosser error than that on which I have just remarked has been the translating of the words *θεοί* and *δii*, in the plural, by the proper name "God" or "the Deity." It is an error so obvious and so indefensible, that it is unnecessary to remark upon it. Yet it has been a common one. It occurs, for instance, in Francklin's Translation (which I have quoted) of Cicero's work "On the Nature of the Gods," and even Cudworth himself has fallen into it. "It is no unusual thing," says Leland, "for Christian writers in their quotations from heathen authors, to produce passages relating to the gods, as a proof that the Heathens acknowledged the government and attributes of the Deity in the Christian sense."†

Beside the facts which have been mentioned respecting the signification of *θεός* and *deus* as used by ancient heathen writers, another is to be attended to. Those words had a very wide application. When we think of the heathen gods, our first conception is of a class of beings resembling men, though considered as far superior, all of

* *Metaphysic. Lib. xiv. c. 7.*

† Leland's *Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation*, Part. i. Ch. 14. note *e*. See also note *q*. In these notes Leland gives examples of writers who have committed this error.

whom were respectively entitled to the common appellation "God." But this appellation was extended much further, to beings not having a personal existence, to irrational and inanimate things; to virtues and vices; to events, as to Victory; and to passions, affections, powers and other attributes. To take an enumeration given by Le Clerc, "The Romans had temples of Intellect, Virtue, Honor, Piety, Fidelity, Hope, Modesty, Concord, Peace, Quiet, Safety, Felicity, and Liberty."* "Let there be shrines," says Cicero in his imaginary system of laws, "in honor of those qualities by which man ascends to heaven, Intellect, Virtue, Piety, Fidelity."† "They all have temples dedicated to them at Rome; and it is well that they should be consecrated, and that statues should be erected to them, that those who possess them, as all the good do possess them, should believe that gods themselves dwell in their souls."‡ Le Clerc, after giving the enumeration which I have quoted from him, says; "It does not seem probable to me that the Romans believed in all these gods with a clear assent of mind." They did not, I conceive, believe in them as gods having a personal existence, from whom favors might be obtained by supplication; they regarded them as qualities having something divine in their nature, to which public honors should be paid with appropriate rites. §

In regard to irrational and inanimate things there is a liability to mistake. We must not reckon among them the Sun, the Moon, or the stars, or other things which we regard as inanimate, but which the ancients believed to be vehicles of personal divinities, to whom, and not to the inanimate bodies, they rendered worship. But there is no question, that the name of "god" was given to beings regarded as irrational and inanimate. Of this we have a remarkable proof in the deification by the Egyptians of whole classes of animals, as the ibis, the ichneumon, and the crocodile, and even of vegetables. "The Egyptians," says the elder Pliny, "swear by garlic and onions, as gods;"|| and Juvenal¶

* *Ars Critica*, P. ii. S. i. c. 8. § 8.

† *De Legibus*, Lib. ii. § 8.

‡ *Ibid.* § 11.

¶ § Thus, during the atheistical madness of the French Revolution, it was proposed to establish the worship of Reason, and the five intercalary days at the end of the year were consecrated as festivals of Genius, of Labor, of Actions, of Rewards, and of Opinion.

|| *Hist. Nat. Lib.* xix. § 32.

¶ *Sat.* xv. vv. 9-11.

and Prudentius* refer to the same superstition. No one can imagine that the Egyptians worshipped these animals and vegetables as personal divinities; but they conceived that there was some divine power in them, or that they were something sacred. The point to be regarded is, that the common name "god" was so widely extended as to be applied to them. There were other strange applications of it. The example is ludicrous; but we have the authority of Aristotle for saying that it was given to a sneeze. He proposes the problem: "Why do we consider a sneeze to be θεός?"†—certainly not meaning by that term "a god," but "something divine." And he seriously discusses the question why this name was not given to some other accidents of the body, which he regards as analogous, but which at the present day we are not accustomed to name.‡

Thus it appears, that the most generic meaning of θεός and *deus* was merely "something divine," that term being taken in a very loose sense, admitting of no precise definition. There was only a popular and vague conception of the quality meant to be denoted by them in their most extensive application. It is evident, therefore, that there are cases of their occurrence in the singular number, in which we should render either of them erroneously by giving as an equivalent the term "god." We should use the words "something divine" or "divinity" or "divine power," or some like expression. Thus when θεός or *deus* is used in the singular by ancient heathen writers, it may be employed not to denote any personal being distinctly conceived of, but that divine power, "*quicquid est hoc*,"§ which controls the universe. ||

* De Coronis, Hymnus x. vv. 259, 260. Contra Symmachi Orat. Lib. ii. vv. 865-867.

† Διὰ τί τὸν πταρμὸν θεὸν ἡγοῦμεθα εἶναι; "Is it," says Aristotle, "because it proceeds from the most divine part of us, the head, where are the reasoning powers? Or because the others [other affections of the body before mentioned by him] are the consequence of disease, but this is not?" Problemata. Sect. 33. § 7.

‡ Ibid. § 9.

§ This expression is from Pacuvius as quoted by Cicero in his first Book *de Divinatione* (§ 57). The verses of Pacuvius may serve further to illustrate the conception spoken of above.

"Quicquid est hoc, omnia animat, format, alit, auget, creat,
Sepelit, recipitque in sese omnia; omniumque idem est pater;
Indidemque eadem, quæ oriuntur, de integro, atque eodem occidunt."

|| There was anciently a popular use of the word *deus* in the singular number, which several of the Latin fathers have appealed to, as showing a natural con-

But we must distinguish between those heathen writers who preceded, and those who followed, the introduction of Christianity. The use of

consciousness in men of the one God. The object of Tertullian in his treatise "On the Testimony of the Soul," is to prove that the soul, even while yet unchristianized, instinctively bears testimony to the truths of Christianity; and he thus (cap. 2) apostrophizes it, considered as the soul of a heathen. "We give offence," he says, "by preaching the only God, the author and ruler of all things, under that only name. Give your testimony, if you know this to be so. For we hear you openly and with all liberty, which is not permitted us, pronounce at home and abroad, '*Quod deus dederit*,' and '*Quod deus voluerit*.'" This use of *deus* in the singular, Tertullian considers as a recognition of the One God. He adds; "Nor are you ignorant of what we preach concerning the nature of God. You say, '*Deus bonus*,' '*Deus benefacit*,' and add, 'but man is bad (*sed homo est malus*).'"

It is not to be supposed that Tertullian, and the other fathers who employed this argument, believed that the commonalty among the Heathen, when they used these expressions, had in their thoughts a distinct conception of that God, whom they acknowledged in none of their rites of worship, and "whom it was a thing forbidden to point out to the vulgar."^a The fathers, I conceive, so far as they understood themselves, regarded those expressions, as an instinctive recognition, not well comprehended by those who uttered them, of a truth originally stamped upon the soul.

But the argument, like so many others in ancient writers, is a mere rhetorical sophism. In the words "*Quod deus dederit*," as in all the other expressions alleged, the name *deus* must be taken in one of three senses. Thus, "*Quod deus dederit*" may mean, "Which may a god grant;" or "Which may the gods grant;" or "Which may divine power grant."

In regard to the second meaning, "Which may the gods grant," we see in the words "*Deus bonus, sed homo est malus*," that *homo* is to be understood in a plural signification, and in the same manner we may understand *deus*.

But in such ejaculations as "*Quod deus dederit*," we may conjecture, that, so far as any meaning was defined in the mind of him who uttered them, the reference was to divine power considered in the abstract, and not as existing in any particular being or beings. If this explanation be correct, the argument of the fathers was not so obvious a sophism, as it must otherwise appear. It might be stated thus; In this recognition of a Divine power, by which events are ordered, and which is not referred by you to any one of the gods whom you ordinarily worship, there is evidence of that conception of the Divinity which belongs to the nature of the soul.

Cudworth (Ch. iv. § 27. p. 453) and Le Clerc (*Ars Critica*, P. ii. S. i. c. 2. § 10) both remark on this argument of the fathers. Cudworth, from the expressions cited, strangely concludes, that it was "very familiar with the vulgar Pagans in

^a See before, p. 183.

θεός and *deus* as common names was the necessary result of the general prevalence of polytheism. But, when the unity of God, and the infinite distinction between him and all other beings are fully recognised, the terms denoting the possession of divine attributes become confined in their strict and literal application to the only being by whom such attributes are possessed. By the writers of the New Testament the appellation θεός, either with or without the article, is constantly used as a proper name, in the same manner as the word "God" is used at the present day. We are familiar with the fact, and it may not, without some consideration, make an impression on our minds. But, considering the universal use of θεός as a common name by the whole heathen world before their time, and by Christians, as we shall see, subsequent to their time, it is a fact, I conceive, which admits of no explanation, except that which is found in the divine origin of the Jewish and Christian dispensations.

The rapid and wide influence of Christianity even on those by whom it was rejected, produced a tendency to a similar use of it in their writings. The light of our religion was early reflected from the heathen philosophy which stood opposed to it. But the heathen writers after the time of Christ, who used ὁ θεός or θεός or *deus* to designate the Supreme Divinity, or the Supreme Power in Nature, at the same time believed in subordinate gods; and therefore still continued to employ the words as common names. The use of them was vacillating; men's notions were unsettled; and their meaning in particular passages is often to be determined only by the known opinions of the writer, and by the attributes or acts which he ascribes to the being of whom he speaks.

The early fathers familiarly used θεός and *Deus* as proper names. But they likewise fell back on the use of those words as common names. The latter use of them, however, is not to be confounded with a metaphorical use of the name of God, not infrequent in some authors, both ancient and modern, according to which the name "god" is applied to inferior beings, as to men for example, considered as possessing attri-

their ordinary discourse to speak of *God* singularly, signifying thereby the one Supreme Deity." Le Clerc, on the contrary, considers *deus*, when used in the ejaculations mentioned, as referring to "a god, whoever he might be, who was regarded as presiding over the affair in hand;" and consequently views the argument as futile.

butes like those of God. This metaphorical use of the term is common in the writings of Clement of Alexandria,* and not less so in the "Night Thoughts" of Young. But, when the term is in use as a common name, it is not always easy to distinguish between the metaphorical and the generic use of it, and the writer himself may not well discriminate between them. We can hardly doubt, however, that Clement uses the term as a common name, when he speaks of "the whole army of angels and gods being subject to the Son of God."†

Of the use of the terms *θεός* and *deus* as common names by the earlier fathers, the most remarkable example is found in the application of them to the Logos, considered as a real person, or, in other words, to the Son or Christ. Of this, some passages which I have formerly quoted in relation to another subject afford illustration.‡ An indefinite number of others might be adduced. It is a main purpose of Justin Martyr, in his "Dialogue with Trypho," to prove that there is another god, the Logos, beside the Supreme Being. He says to Trypho and his companions; "I will endeavour to convince you, who understand the Scriptures [the Old Testament], that, under the Maker of All,§ there is another, who is, and is called, god and lord, and who is also called an angel, because he is the minister of the Maker of All, above whom there is no other god, in whatever communications it is his will to make to men."|| Tertullian, in maintaining the personal divinity of the Logos, says; "We believe that there is one only God; but we believe also, that of this only God there is a Son, his Logos," and that he "was sent by his Father into a virgin, and born from her a man and a god."¶ This is one of the many passages which show what confusion, and even what apparent contradiction of terms, were produced by using the word "god" both as a proper and a common name. Origen, borrowing the remark from Philo,** contends, that, while the Only True God, he who is God by himself (*αὐτόθεος ὁ Θεός*) is alone to be called *ὁ Θεός* (*The Divine Being*), there are many, and, in the first place, the Logos, to whom the name *θεός* (*a divine being*) without the article may be given; they being made

* See "Statement of Reasons," pp. 67, 68.

† Stromat. vii. § 2. p. 831.

‡ See before, p. 150, seqq.

§ — *ὅπερ τὸν ποιητὴν τῶν ὅλων*. The true reading is *ὅπερ*, not *ὅπερ* (which is a conjecture of R. Stephens). See Thirlby's note, and the Benedictine (Maran's) edition, p. 151.

|| Pag. 249. Ed. Thirlbii.

¶ Advers. Praxeam, c. 2. p. 501. See before, p. 272, note.

** Philo, De Somniis, Lib. i. Opp. i. 655.

gods, that is, divine beings, by a participation of the divinity of God.* We find this notion of other beings becoming "gods" (*di*) by a participation of divinity, even so late as the sixth century, in Boethius. "Beatitude," he says, "is divinity." "Every being, therefore, possessing beatitude is a god (*Omnis igitur beatus, deus*). By nature there is, indeed, but one God, but nothing prevents that there should be very many by participation."† Perhaps, however, the word is here used metaphorically rather than as a common name.

There is no doubt that the earlier fathers gave the name "god" to the Logos as a common name, using it in a sense altogether different from that in which they regarded it as the appropriate name of the Supreme Being. But they also applied it to the Logos in the latter sense by a common metonymy; the Logos being considered as the representative and the instrument of God, as an hypostatized attribute of God, and as a being who was one with God in purpose and will. This figurative use of the word was blended with its use as a common name, and seemed to justify it.

Of the confusion of thought and indistinctness of meaning, produced by the use of *θεός* and *deus* sometimes as proper and sometimes as common names, we have an example in the charge brought by the catholic Christians against the Gnostics, that the Gnostics taught the existence of two Gods, the Supreme Being and the Creator. It was as a common name, that the Gnostics applied the term "god" to the Creator, and not in the sense in which both they and the catholic Christians used it as the proper name of God. They might have retorted on the catholic Christians, that the latter, in giving the name "god" to the Logos, taught the existence of two Gods, or even, as appears from what precedes, that they taught the existence of many Gods.

Other remarks might be added, but they would tend, perhaps, to divert attention from the main facts that have been stated; and, supposing those facts to be true, they are such as every intelligent scholar may make for himself.

* Comment. in Joan. T. ii. Opp. iv. 51, 52.

† De Consolatione, Lib. iii. Prosa 10.

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